

Hallelujah Train

The Wallingham wagon-train set out to carry a heady cargo of whiskey and champagne from Julesburg to Denver in 1867. It had a military escort provided by Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart, Commander at Fort Russell. But, unknown to the Colonel, a group of Sioux Indians were on the move, and another band of escorts were heading up from the thirsty city of Denver. To make matters worse, Mrs Cora Massingale, leader of a bevy of temperance-minded suffragettes, was determined to prevent the drink from reaching its destination.

These very different groups of people converged on the Hallelujah train halfway between Julesburg and Denver, and in the hilarious *melée* which ensued no single bottle was left to tell the tale.

By Bill Gulick

**THE SHAMING OF BROKEN HORN
THE MOON-EYED APPALOOSA**

HALLELUJAH TRAIN



Bill Gulick



ANDRE DEUTSCH

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Author's Note

Although this book is based upon an actual historical happening, all the characters in it, except a few political figures and the Suffragist lecturer, Sojourner Truth, are fictional and no reference is intended to actual people, living or dead.

When a work of fiction is based on fact, it is customary for the author to give the reader some warning of what to expect. So here it is.

You would be surprised, dear reader, if you knew how much truth there is to the tale you're about to read.

—BILL GULICK

1

After carefully examining the configuration of James Oliver Perry's head at the age of five, an eminent phrenologist had solemnly told the boy's mother that her child's Talent bump was well rounded, though small. "He will be a painter, a musician, or a writer. Now as to his Greatness bump. Ah, intriguing! Most intriguing! Does Madame Perry wish a detailed reading?"

This, of course, was a genteel way of asking if the fond mother thought enough of her offspring to up the examining fee from one dollar to two. Naturally, the fond mother did. Run-of-the-mill head-feelers at this stage of the game were apt to rapturously discover a bump which positively indicated that the child had the makings of a future President. But this Doctor of Phrenology, being French and subtle, phrased the child's prospects more modestly.

"He will know Great Men, Madame. Many of them! He will be the trusted friend and confidant of one, two, three—yes, *three*, Madame—Presidents of the United States of America! I am positive of that! Now, if Madame Perry should desire a further examination. . . ."

Madame Perry already had invested two dollars more of the housekeeping funds than her husband, a Washington City attorney of modest income, would be likely to approve, so the head-feeling had gone no further. But the Eminent Doctor's predictions had affected the entire youth, education, and training of James Oliver Perry, who was to be—his mother fondly believed—a Man of Talent destined to Walk with the Great. . . .

Gingerly rubbing his head—which was aching abominably after too large a night on the town with his wartime reporter friends

from the New York *Tribune*—Jim Perry stared gloomily out of the train window at the rain-swept landscape, thinking with infinite tenderness of his long dead mother, brooding with an experienced newspaperman's cynicism on the thirty-year-past predictions of the charlatan who had taken two badly needed dollars from an innocent, trusting woman.

Feel of my head now, Doctor. Gently, for God's sake! Big, isn't it? All I ever painted was a picket fence. Can't carry a tune in a bucket. Well, yes, I have written a bit, if you want to call chasing around the country covering riots, political conventions, strikes, Suffragist rallies, and wars, writing. Sure, I've Walked with the Great. Abe Lincoln; Andy Johnson—I've walked many a mile trying to keep up with them. And I knew Grant long before Shiloh, Vicksburg, and Richmond, when he was only too happy to trade me an exclusive story for a cigar and a couple of snorts of booze. So I've got to admit you've hit a fair share of your predictions, Eminent Doctor. But try again. Feel of my head—*gently*, I said, *gently*!

All right, you've found it. Can you locate any bump that tells you Grant will give me a hearing? He's President of the United States now, you know. Am I wasting my time? Should I just keep the damned report, hop the next train back to New York, and kiss my promised ten thousand bucks good-by?

After mentally summoning the Eminent Doctor from whatever Limbo he now did business in, Jim Perry leaned back, closed his eyes, and waited hopefully for a voice, a token, a sign. Nothing happened. With a sigh of disappointment, he folded his hands over the locked attaché case on his lap, resolutely closed his ears to the clanking of train wheels and the babble of voices in the crowded coach, and fell into a light, uneasy sleep.

To President Ulysses S. Grant, this had been a long, tedious, tiring day. He had been dignified, as his advisers had cautioned him to be. He had been patient. He had been polite, diplomatic, pleasant, sympathetic—in a word, he had been everything which by nature he was not—and the effort had been wearing.

Standing before the tall window of his office, he gazed out into the rain-swept April twilight and recalled with sudden pleas-

ure that the day was Saturday. Somewhere in the gloomy mansion which he had called home for a month, he heard a clock strike six. Enough. Six successive twelve-hour days of office work were as much as any man could bear. Even the President of the United States. Wearily he crossed the room, sat down behind the huge desk, and ran a hand over his eyes.

Yes, Mr. Representative of the Eight-Hour-Day-For-Factory-Workers-Union, I shall give consideration to your aims. Indeed, Mrs. Votes-For-Women, your ambition is a worthy one. Certainly, Mr. Negro, Mr. Immigrant, Mr. Ex-Yankee Soldier, Mr. Reconstructed Southerner, I shall take your desires under advisement.

And now, Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen, will you join my Worthy Movement? It's called Be-Kind-to-the-President League. The requirements for membership are simple. First, you sit down, unbutton your coat, put your feet up on the desk, dig out cigars and whiskey. . . .

The heavy office door opened and closed discreetly and a tall, thin, discreet Appointments Secretary said, "Mr. President. . . ."

"No more today, Rufus. Please, no more today."

"But the business of this gentleman is unusual, urgent, and very personal, sir."

"They all say that. Put him at the top of the list for Monday morning. I'll give him a post office then."

"He doesn't want a post office."

"Eh?"

"He has a report to make to you, sir. A special, secret, highly personal report."

President Grant impatiently waved a hand. "Send him to the head of the Special-Secret-Highly-Personal Bureau. If we haven't got such a bureau, have somebody organize one."

"You'll pardon me, Mr. President," Rufus said, "but you should know that this gentleman has been a correspondent for the New York *Tribune* through the two previous administrations."

"What's his name?"

"James Perry, sir."

President Grant rubbed his chin. "Jim Perry, eh? Hell, I got

drunk with him once years ago." Rufus gave a discreet cough, meant to be a reminder, the President knew, that there were certain old habits best unmentioned by certain people. "How come Jim Perry is making a special, secret, highly personal report to me? I never authorized it."

"No, sir. But your predecessor did."

"Andy?"

"Yes, sir. Perhaps you would like to see the letter of authorization?"

"Not particularly," President Grant grunted, waving the paper away as Secretary Rufus started to hand it across the desk to him. "But you can read it to me."

Adjusting his glasses, Rufus cleared his throat and read in a precise voice: "To Whom It May Concern: This is to introduce Special Investigator James Oliver Perry, who is authorized by this office to gather all evidence, take all testimony, and to use any means he may desire to ascertain the fate of the Wallingham Train. Full co-operation of all United States citizens, whether in governmental or civilian employ, is requested. By order of Andrew Johnson, President of the United States."

"What's the date?"

"March 1, 1868, sir."

"Hmm. That was about the time the impeachment proceedings started, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Mr. President."

"What was this Wallingham Train business about?"

"I haven't the foggiest notion, sir. But it occurs to me that if President Johnson considered it worth investigating, there well might be material of political import. . . ." Secretary Rufus gave the President a veiled smile. "The implications are obvious, Mr. President."

Indeed they were, the President mused. Politically speaking, Andrew Johnson was as dead as a dodo, but if this special report were to reveal scandalous events that had occurred during his administration—as it very well might—political duty to the Republican party required that such events be classified and filed away for possible future use. If the report revealed the opposite, of course, it deserved and would receive proper and private burial.

"All right, send him in. But that's all for today—absolutely all."

As the office door discreetly closed behind Jim Perry, leaving him to commune alone with the third President of his career, he could not help but feel ill at ease. Grant looked older, heavier, more solemn, which was only to be expected. Should one smile pleasantly? Should one step forward or remain where he was? Should one speak first or wait until spoken to?

"Well, Jim," President Grant said, rising and extending his hand. "You've put on weight."

"The same might be said for you, Mr. President."

The President laughed as they shook hands, motioned him into a chair on the far side of the desk, opened a drawer, and dug out a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. "I've owed you a drink for quite a while. Will you join me?"

"A pleasure, Mr. President."

"Cigar?"

"Thank you."

To all outward appearances, the next few minutes were taken up by trivial surface courtesies as President Grant politely made inquiries regarding the health, family, and occupational wanderings of his visitor during the past few years, reminisced about mutual acquaintances, and told a couple of political jokes currently going the rounds in Washington City. But knowing Grant of old, Jim Perry was not misled. He was being weighed, sized up, measured. More smoothly, less obviously than of old, true, but it was crystal clear to him that whatever extra fat Ulysses S. Grant had acquired by the passage of time, none had accumulated within his head.

Refilling their glasses, the President said, "You have a report, I'm told."

"Yes, sir."

"Let's have it."

Unlocking the attaché case, Jim Perry took out a thick, pen-written manuscript neatly bound between stiff covers, rose, and started to place it on the desk in front of the President. "Here it is, sir."

"My God!" Grant exclaimed, recoiling in consternation. "That's a whole damned book!"

"It's as lengthy as a book, I must admit, sir. You see, its subject is quite complicated and takes a great deal of elaboration."

"Give me the gist of it in as few words as possible."

Jim Perry sat down. "That's very difficult to do, sir."

"Only if you make it so," the President said testily. Leaning forward, he pointed his cigar at his visitor as if it were a pistol. "Should the need arise, I could put the entire history of the Civil War into three sentences and leave out nothing important. To hell with details! What's the subject of your report?"

"The Wallingham Train. You see, it consisted of eighty wagons——"

"What happened to it?"

"It disappeared."

"Where?"

"Between Julesburg and Denver, Colorado Territory."

"When?"

"Late November, 1867."

"Why is its disappearance of national importance?"

Jim Perry hesitated long enough to refresh his parched throat with a hasty gulp of unwatered whiskey, then said nervously, "That's where the complications begin, Mr. President. You see, there were so many conflicting elements involved——"

"List them."

"Indians."

"Go on."

"Denver businessmen."

"Yes?"

"The Army."

"Anything else?"

"Suffragists."

"Oh Lord!" the President groaned, leaning back in his chair and rolling his eyes toward the ceiling. "If the ladies were involved, it would get complicated!" He was thoughtfully silent for a moment, then said, "This train of eighty wagons disappeared, you say?"

"Yes, Mr. President. In a manner of speaking, that is."

"What do you mean by that? Either it did or it didn't."

"Oh, the train disappeared, sir, there's no doubt of that. But there is a question as to whether its disappearance was permanent or temporary."

"I see," the President murmured, though the puzzlement in his sharp eyes indicated that he did not. "Well, tell me this: How many people were lost?"

"None, sir."

"Then what's all the fuss about?"

"The wagon train's cargo, Mr. President."

"Which was?"

Jim Perry gulped the rest of his drink, swallowed hastily, and then sat twirling the empty glass between his hands. "Twenty-seven hundred cases of French champagne, Mr. President."

"What!"

"Yes, sir. And 1600 barrels of American whiskey."

"Backtrack a bit," President Grant said grimly, "and forget about using as few words as possible. These eighty freight wagons disappeared somewhere between Julesburg and Denver, you said?"

"That's right. The Wallingham Company was a firm of professional freighters. They had picked up their cargo at the Julesburg railhead and were transporting it to Denver."

"Were the people there afraid that the distilleries were going to cease operating?"

"Denver's business life depends upon mining, sir. Thousands of miners winter there. When winter comes, heavy snows on the high plains sometimes cut off all trade with the outside world. The miners like to socialize——"

"That's a nice way of putting it. But, good Lord, 2700 cases of champagne and 1600 barrels of whiskey!"

"A long, hard winter was anticipated, sir."

The President relighted his cigar, which had gone out. "All right, you've got my curiosity aroused. The wagon train disappeared. I can see how that would stir up the saloon keepers. But how did the Indians, the Army, and the Suffragists get mixed up in it?"

Jim Perry sighed. "My report explains everything, Mr. President. I prefer that you read it for yourself."

"I'm a poor reader and a busy man. Give it to me verbally or toss it in the wastebasket."

"Do you mean, sir, that you want me to *read* it to you?"

"Why not? It sounds entertaining."

"A reading would take hours."

"Well, I've got a supply of cigars and whiskey on hand," President Grant said dryly, a faint twinkle brightening his eyes. "If it's a good yarn, we'll fight it out on these lines if it takes all night." Glass in hand, the President rose, shambled over to the office door, opened it, and called, "Rufus!"

"Yes, Mr. President?"

"Anything important hanging fire?"

Although Jim Perry did not deliberately eavesdrop, he could hear Secretary Rufus discreetly bringing Grant up to the minute on impending crises with England, France, Mexico, and half a dozen domestic pressure groups. The mere thought of keeping his tongue agile and his wits sharp enough to sit in the President's private office and read a 200-odd page report aloud, while at the same time matching Grant drink for drink—as politeness required he do—utterly paralyzed him. Oh, Eminent Head-Feeler, I had hoped for a hearing, yes. But isn't this overdoing it a trifle?

"All right, Rufus," the President said. "There's nothing that can't wait until Monday. See that we're not disturbed. We'll want something to eat presently. About nine o'clock, say—no, make it ten. That's all for now."

Behind him, Jim Perry heard the door close firmly. He took a deep breath as he watched President Grant take off his coat, toss it aside, unbutton his vest, loosen his collar, sink into his chair, and put his feet up on the desk with an audible sigh of comfort.

"Mr. President——"

"Yes, Jim?"

"You will find my report interesting, I believe, and I'm only too happy to read you as much of it as you're willing to listen to. But before I begin, there are several things I must tell you."

"Fire away."

"First, President Johnson chose me as his special investigator not because I was a close friend or sympathetic to his policies but

because he respected my abilities as a newspaperman. In other words, he felt I would be truthful, impartial, and fair."

"Well, that makes *one* sensible thing Andy's done."

"Second, in order to make the investigation I was forced to take a leave of absence from the New York *Tribune*. So I have had no source of income for over a year."

"You're not on the government payroll?"

"No, sir. However, President Johnson did promise me a cash payment of \$10,000 when my job was done."

Grant's eyes narrowed. "Do you have that in writing?"

"No, sir. The nature of my investigation was such— Well, you see, Mr. President, there apparently were pressures on Andrew Johnson from so many different groups that, in order to prevent leaks, the matter had to be kept strictly private."

"You got expense money, of course."

"No, sir. I was entirely on my own."

Scowling, President Grant picked up the letter which Secretary Rufus had given him. "You had this. Didn't you use it?"

"Only in the beginning, sir—until I learned that instead of opening doors for me, it closed them. The moment people found out who I represented, they clammed up, hedged their stories, or told me outright lies. You know how people are, sir, when questioned on matters that might affect their careers, financial well-being, or personal welfare."

The President admitted he had had some experience along that line. "How did you get at the truth?"

"By becoming intimate with the people involved in the matter, sir. By listening, observing, surmising. By patience, perseverance, and an occasional piece of blind luck."

"Which is why it took you so long?"

"Exactly."

"And the thing that's troubling you now is that with Andy out of office and me in, you may not get your promised \$10,000?"

Long as the evening gave promise of being, Jim Perry knew he should not take another drink just now, even though the President had poured him a stiff one and was shoving it across the desk toward him. But he needed a bracer badly, if he were to find the courage to say what had to be said. Making no effort

to conceal the trembling of his hand, he lifted the glass and quickly drained it. As soon as his breath returned, he got shakily to his feet, laid the bound report on the desk, and tapped it with the index finger of his right hand.

"Mr. President, I have been wrestling with my conscience for weeks over what to do with this report. If I turn it in to the United States Government—and I have not yet been paid one dime for my efforts, I remind you—the public may never see one line of it. On the other hand, I have good reason to believe that the New York *Tribune* would pay me handsomely for it. Quite handsomely, indeed."

President Grant remained silent for long moments, his eyes glittering coldly. At last, he said, "Jim, coming from anybody but you, I would call that blackmail."

It was best to sit down. After all, even with three drinks under one's belt, one did not give ultimatums to the President of the United States. Weakly, Jim said, "The ambition of every reporter, sir, is to find a story that is what we call 'a natural' and to write it so well that it will be remembered for a little while. This is such a story. I have put a great deal of myself into it. I had hoped for some reward."

President Grant threw back his head and laughed heartily. "Hell, Jim, I'm a fair man—you know that. I'll make you a promise. If this cockeyed yarn of yours is too hot to turn loose on the public, I'll pay you what Andy promised. If not, you can sell it to the *Tribune*. Start reading."

Jim Perry did.

This is what he read. . . .

2

In the opinion of this investigator, the sequence of events leading to the disaster that overtook the Wallingham Train began on November 16, 1867, when the following news item appeared in the Julesburg paper:

"Eighty freight wagons, pulled by mule teams and owned by the firm of Wallingham & Co., left the railhead here yesterday, bound for Denver. Although Frank Wallingham, owner-manager of the company, churlishly refused to reveal the nature of the train's cargo to your inquiring editor, a reliable source informs us that the wagons are carrying 2700 cases of imported French champagne and 1600 barrels of Philadelphia-brewed whiskey. (*Looks like hi-jinks in Denver, come snow-fly!*)

"Barring adverse traveling conditions, Indian difficulties, or delays caused by government tax collectors, it is anticipated that the wagon train will reach its destination within two or three weeks. Its route is being kept a closely guarded secret. (*Small wonder!*)"

Perhaps it should be pointed out that, contrary to the practice of eastern newspapers which report the news objectively, frontier publications all too frequently mix editorial comment and personal animosities with their supposedly factual writings. Note, for example, the adverb "churlishly" in the first paragraph; also, the facetious, italicized comments at the end of each paragraph. A deplorable practice, certainly; however, it is mentioned here not in a tone of censure but to point up the fact that it often leads to bad feeling between editor and reader.

This, no doubt, was why Frank Wallingham went to the print shop in Julesburg and attempted to horsewhip the editor,

Michael O'Dea. That Wallingham did not accomplish his desire may be accounted for, so reliable witnesses say, by the fact that O'Dea habitually kept a loaded pistol on his desk or person, and, having frequently experienced the wrath of disgruntled readers in time past, it was but second nature to him to pick up the weapon and prepare to defend himself when he saw Wallingham come into the office with a mule-skinner's whip in his hand.

No attempt will be made to set down the exact conversation that took place between the two men, for no qualified shorthand stenographer was present, but witnesses interviewed later agree that the essence of the verbal exchange was to the following effect:

"You dirty Irish blackguard! Why don't you mind your own business?"

"News is my business, you stupid Dutch blockhead!"

"Don't you know every paper in the West will reprint that story?"

"Which proves my point. It is news."

"But I wanted it kept quiet."

"Why? Aren't your federal taxes paid?"

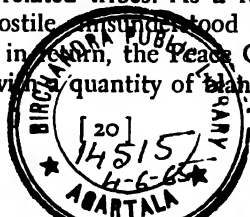
"Sure, they're paid! I'm an honest, legitimate businessman. But you know how these Internal Revenue Department snoopers are. Give them the slightest hint there's honey, they swarm down on you from all directions like a mess of bees."

"You have my deepest sympathy."

"And another thing. Indians have been raising hell all over this part of the country. Once they get wind of the fact a wagon train loaded with whiskey is on the trail, what do you think they'll do?"

"The Indian problem has been settled, Mr. Wallingham. Haven't you read the report from the Peace Commissioners?"

The group referred to had consisted of a committee of government negotiators recently sent out from Washington City to confer with the leading chiefs of the Sioux, Cheyenne, Crow, Arapaho, and related tribes. As a result of prolonged talks, the formerly hostile misunderstood natives had made certain promises, and, in return, the Peace Commissioners had supplied the Indians with a quantity of blankets, beads, knives,



ammunition, and war surplus rifles. It had been stipulated, of course, that the weapons were to be used only for the hunting of game; however, some cynical white people, living and working in the high plains area where Nebraska, Colorado Territory, and Dakota Territory are contiguous to one another, felt that the nature of the game to be hunted by the Indians should have been specifically delineated as to exclude themselves, their having been in time past the redman's favorite game.

Frank Wallingham, who was noted for his violent rages, turned apoplectic, shook the coiled whip he was holding in the editor's face despite the leveled gun, and unleashed a stream of profanity which need not be repeated here. "You'd like to see those red devils wipe out my train and ruin me, wouldn't you?"

"Mr. Wallingham, you're overwrought. Such a thought never entered my mind."

"You're lying! You know I've invested every dollar I could lay my hands on in that cargo, hoping to make a fair profit——"

"I suspected as much, yes. Thanks for confirming my suspicions."

"—and just because my politics are different from yours, just because I refuse to advertise in the filthy rag you call a newspaper, just because I couldn't be blackmailed into giving you a couple of cases of whiskey——"

A wise man once said: *"Confront a liar with the truth, his face and his tongue will deny it—but his muscles will give him away."* Witnesses to the affray all agree that only the fact that Michael O'Dea leaped angrily to his feet as he pulled the trigger, thus altering the aim of his pistol, prevented Frank Wallingham from being shot squarely between the eyes. But fortunately the bullet did go astray. There then followed a short, fierce, hand-to-hand struggle between the two men. Being much the larger and stronger, Wallingham soon managed to wrest the pistol away, throw it out into the street, and cast O'Dea in a heap in one corner of the room.

For a brief moment, the owner of the freighting company stood glaring down at his adversary, breathing heavily, toying with the whip as if strongly inclined to accomplish his original purpose in coming here, then changing his mind and exclaiming in utter contempt, "Damned if I'll wear out good leather on a

skunk like you! Now hear me well, O'Dea. I'm wiring Colonel Gearhart at Fort Russell, demanding a company of cavalry as an escort for my train. Print that! You can also print that all the taxes I'm liable for have been paid; that I personally intend to leave Julesburg this afternoon to catch up with my wagon train and see it through; that I and all my men are well armed with repeating rifles; and that any tax snooper, white road agent, or red Indian that comes anywhere near my wagons had better be wearing cast-iron underwear! Good day, sir!"

Julesburg residents acquainted with Michael O'Dea declare that, like most Irishmen, he was an exceedingly proud man, incapable of forgiving an affront to his dignity, however well deserved it might have been. Rising slowly to his feet, he brushed himself off, went to the door, and stood gazing for a time at his conqueror's retreating figure, then, without so much as a glance at the printers and apprentices who were staring at him, sat down at his desk and began to write furiously. When he had finished, he beckoned to an apprentice boy.

"Have this set in ten-point boldface. Tell all the help to stand by. We're putting out an extra."

"Yes, Mr. O'Dea."

"Hustle, damn you! No, wait a minute. Where did that female hellcat who lectured in Julesburg last week go when she left here? You know the woman I mean—Mrs. Martingale."

"Massingale, sir. You spelled her name wrong on the posters, remember? She came in and peeled your hide off."

"Mind your silly tongue! Didn't she head for Cheyenne?"

"Search me."

"If I did, you may be sure there's one thing I wouldn't find," O'Dea said acidly.

"What?"

"A brain!" Rummaging around the desk, the editor picked up an exchange paper. "Sure, here it is in the *Leader*:

'Arriving in Cheyenne Tuesday last for a week-long series of lectures, Mrs. Cora Templeton Massingale, nationally known leader of the Woman Suffrage movement, minced no words when interviewed regarding the aims and objectives of the group which she represents. Since the dawn of

time, Slavery has caused untold misery in the world, she pointed out. It has existed in three forms: (1) the Enslavement of the Negro by the white man; (2) the Enslavement of women by their husbands; and (3) the Enslavement of men themselves by that remorseless tyrant Alcohol.

'Now that Negro Slavery has been ended in the United States, Mrs. Massingale continued, Women may move on to attack with all their force Unconquered Bastions (2) and (3). Speaking to an audience of two hundred and fifty townswomen and soldiers' wives assembled at the Fort Russell Recreation Hall Wednesday night, Mrs. Massingale completely enthralled her listeners as she described the role played by her organization in forcing President Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. The same technique will work, she declares, in giving Women the Vote and closing the Grog Shops.

"The scattering of males standing at the rear of the Recreation Hall (of which your editor was one) applauded politely at the conclusion of Mrs. Massingale's speech, but, though invited to, did not partake in the question and answer period nor in the hymn-singing session which closed the meeting.'"

Except as revealed by his subsequent actions, it is impossible to describe the exact nature of Michael O'Dea's thoughts as he finished reading the article. One witness has called his smile "diabolical." At any event, it is a matter of record that he penned and sent the following telegram:

MRS. CORA TEMPLETON MASSINGALE
CHEYENNE, DAKOTA TERRITORY
C/O FORT RUSSELL RECREATION HALL

NOTE AND APPROVE YOUR CAMPAIGN AGAINST DEMON RUM.
ARE YOU AWARE THAT THIS VERY MOMENT EIGHTY WAG-
ONS LADEN WITH POISONOUS SPIRITS EN ROUTE JULESBURG
TO DENVER? NEWS DISPATCHES INDICATE OWNER OF SAME
DEMANDING COMPANY OF CAVALRY BE SENT FROM FORT RUS-
SELL TO PROTECT TRAIN. CAN NOTHING BE DONE?

SUFFERER

3

In the East, accustomed as one is to our modern miracles of rapid transport and swift communication, one is apt to lose sight of the fact that the Western Frontier is not so well favored. True, the process of railroad building, telegraph-line construction, and daily mail service by stagecoach companies has taken remarkable forward strides in the West since the close of the Rebellion. Nevertheless, in many areas means of communication remain very slow and primitive.

Take the Indians, for example. Despite all the efforts of white missionaries, Aid Societies, and the Indian Bureau, only a minute handful possess the ability to read and write. The savages have no fixed places of abode comparable to our towns and cities; rather, they wander at will from place to place with the seasons, following game, pitching their skin tents in one locality for a week or a month, and then moving on to another.

News is communicated between these nomadic villages by a number of means: by a mounted courier carrying a peculiarly knotted string whose meaning only he can interpret; by smoke signals passed from one high point to the next; by signal fires at night; by mirrors angled to catch flashes of sunlight. Which-ever mode of communication is used, when the bit of news at last reaches the Indian encampment, a strong-voiced man then strolls about (much as town criers did in old England), proclaiming the event aloud to all within hearing.

It has not been possible to establish the amount of time that elapsed between general distribution of the Julesburg paper of November 16 and the day and hour when the news contained therein became general knowledge among the widely scattered Sioux, Cheyenne, Crow, Arapaho, and related tribes. But, judg-

ing from the action taken by some of the younger, wilder, more aggressive members of those tribes, the time lapse was an amazingly brief one.

Because of his intransigency in negotiations with the Peace Commissioners and his earlier involvement (alleged, not proven) in what is known as the Fetterman Massacre, Chief Red Cloud of the Sioux tribe is nationally known. Some evidence has been uncovered indicating that strong pressures were brought to bear on this great chief, urging him to assemble a force of warriors and attack the Wallingham Train. He refused. In the first place, whiskey would be of no use to him (he is quoted as saying), for he was a Temperance Man. In the second place, he had gotten everything he wanted out of the Peace Commissioners anyway.

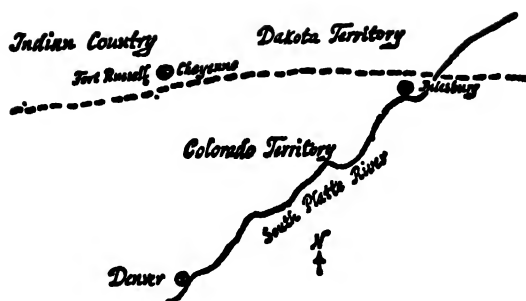
But this fact should be recorded: the young chief who did organize the raiding party was a Sioux and a member of Red Cloud's band. His name was Five Barrels.

Indian nomenclature, as any qualified anthropologist will verify, is a vast, confusing, very complicated field, which varies greatly from tribe to tribe. As a child, an Indian boy may have one name; as a youth, another; as a mature man, still another. After a male Indian achieves manhood and proves himself to be a warrior by deeds of valor, he usually retains his most mature name; however, should he subsequently do something truly outstanding, it is his right, if he so desires, to adopt a new name in personal glorification of that event.

Thus, the name, Five Barrels. Army scouts familiar with the Sioux leader disagree as to the exact details, but the essence of the feat which inspired the name change apparently was the killing of a miserable, debased white trader who, in complete disregard for federal laws, sold whiskey to the Indians, and the appropriation and disposal of the contents of his wagon. Since that unfortunate happening, Chief Five Barrels had developed an inordinate appetite for alcohol. In all fairness, it may be said that the poor Indian became what he was because of an evil white man.

Which of course does not excuse what he did.

A study of a map of the area is in order here.



Note first that the town of Julesburg lies in the extreme north-east corner of Colorado Territory. Denver is to the west and south, the distance being roughly 200 miles. Cheyenne, Dakota Territory, and its adjacent military post, Fort Russell, it should be noted, is situated 100 miles directly west of Julesburg and about the same distance due north of Denver.

It has not been possible to pinpoint the exact location from which Chief Five Barrels set out, but that is not important. What has been established is that the mentally deranged Sioux chief and his band of warriors held their initial meeting in the mountain fastness somewhere to the north of Fort Russell. They knew, of course, that if they were to intercept the Wallingham Train they had a great deal of territory to cover and must traverse it at a rapid pace. Furthermore, they must avoid letting the whites know where they were headed and why. Most important, they must evade encountering Army patrols, which most certainly would attempt to turn them back.

At the start, their band numbered a mere dozen. But because their route led them through a country filled with Indians eager to slake their thirsts and try out their new rifles, their numbers grew rapidly, as a snowball increases in size while rolling downhill. Reliable witnesses estimate that by the time the South Platte River was reached, Chief Five Barrels had under his command at least 200 well-armed hostiles.

But more about that later.

The time has now come to note what was happening in Fort Russell, Denver, and Washington City. . . .

Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart, commandant at Fort Russell, had met Frank Wallingham on numerous occasions, knew him to be a good Republican and a prosperous businessman with influential connections in Washington City, therefore regarded the telegram requesting a military escort for the Wallingham Train as an appeal that could not be denied. After a moment's thought, he sent for the commander of "A" Company, Captain Paul Slater. When the officer had been ushered in, Colonel Gearhart motioned him into a chair.

"A change in plans, Paul."

"Oh?"

"Instead of patrolling the road north to Fort Laramie this afternoon, you will head southeast, intercept a train of eighty freight wagons which left Julesburg yesterday morning, and accompany it to Denver."

"Yes, sir."

"The wagons are owned by Mr. Frank Wallingham. In his telegram, he describes their cargo as valuable; nature not stated. He asks for protection against white roughs, red hostiles, and 'snoopy Internal Revenue Collectors'; color not specified."

Captain Slater smiled. "And Company 'A' is to supply that protection?"

"In the first two cases, yes. In the third, you will protect whichever party seems to require it most. You will keep the peace, in other words."

"Yes, sir."

"You will leave at 2 P.M. Any questions?"

"An eighty-wagon train ordinarily can take care of itself. Why does Mr. Wallingham insist on an escort?"

"Damned if I know. But he does. We've got to furnish it."

"Fort Sedgwick is much nearer Julesburg. Why didn't Major Brandon supply an escort for the train?"

"Short of personnel, I suppose. At any rate, the request came to me. So you're stuck with the job, like it or not."

"Oh, I'm not objecting, sir. It's just that I promised Louise I'd take her on a shopping trip to Denver as soon as I got back from Fort Laramie next week."

"I'll make the necessary explanations. She is my daughter, after all."

It should be explained that Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart, a widower, had a very attractive twenty-year-old daughter, Louise, who had recently become betrothed to Captain Slater. The match had the colonel's unqualified approval. True, he regretted the prospect of losing his daughter, but, since he must lose her, he knew of no man better qualified to make her a good husband than Paul Slater, who was an excellent soldier, a fine officer, and a trusted friend despite his relative youth.

As the captain rose to take his leave, Colonel Gearhart detained him with a brusque gesture. "One moment, Paul. On second thought, maybe you'd better tell her."

"But, sir——!"

"Damn it, boy, when you're married you'll have to learn how to explain these things to her. Might as well begin now."

"Flow, sir? I'd appreciate any pointers you could give me."

"Stress the word 'duty.' Bear down on phrases like 'set an example for the men.' Blame it on the 'system.' Wave the flag. Talk about 'personal sacrifices.'"

"What if she cries?"

"Oh, she'll cry, all right. She'll pout. She'll turn pale, wan, and listless and flutter around like a dove with a broken wing. She'll find a hundred ways to let you know what a brute you are. Pay it no mind. That's a woman's nature."

Captain Slater gazed at his father-in-law-to-be with unconcealed apprehension. "Really, sir? I find that hard to believe. After seeing how Louise has behaved at Mrs. Massingale's lectures——"

"Oh Lord, don't mention that female!" Colonel Gearhart groaned. He glanced over his shoulder at the window. The autumn day was gray and cloudy, thus it was difficult to estimate

the exact hour. But certainly it must be noon. "Would you say the sun is over the yardarm yet, Paul?"

"By a quarter of an hour, at least."

"Good! Let's have a farewell drink."

Watching the colonel fish bottle and glasses out of a desk drawer, Captain Slater said dubiously, "Perhaps it would be best if I didn't join you, sir. If I'm to talk to Louise——"

"Hell, she knows you drink. She knows I drink."

"I know, sir. But since the Temperance Parade last night——"

Colonel Gearhart gazed sternly at his prospective son-in-law. Weakness of character was one fault he could not abide. "Which reminds me, Captain. I gave you strict orders to prevent that. You know as well as I do that army regulations forbid the use of government facilities, personnel, or property for political demonstrations of any nature whatsoever."

"Sir, if I might explain——"

"Permit me to finish, please. Before I left the post to ride into Cheyenne last night, I distinctly recall telling you, 'No demonstrations, Captain.' Those were my exact words. Here's your drink."

"Thank you. Well, you see, Colonel, with you off the post, Major Acree down sick, and myself the ranking officer, I thought it undignified that I personally should attempt to enforce the regulation. And the truth is, it happened so quickly I had no time to marshal my forces. One moment, the women were singing hymns in the Recreation Hall; the next, they were forming a line, marching out, and heading for the parade ground——"

"Led by our Fort Russell band, I'm told."

"No, sir. Mrs. Massingale was leading the march. Your daughter was next, *then* came the band. It was playing 'Battle Hymn of the Republic'——"

"And you let it go on playing! You let those 250 females march up and down the parade ground, disturbing everybody's rest, proclaiming to the whole damned world that the military personnel of Fort Russell stands foursquare behind the Temperance Movement!"

"You've been misinformed, Colonel. I did not deliberately *let* them do anything. In fact, I gave Lieutenant Dirks a firm, direct verbal order to dismiss the band. Apparently he failed to hear

me, though I repeated it at least three times. I sent an order to the O.D. to turn out the guard and clear the parade ground. Apparently it never reached him. This is understandable, considering the confusion of the moment. The women were singing quite loudly, sir, the band was playing, and every time it came to a 'Hallelujah!' some fool fired the cannon——"

Colonel Gearhart wearily lifted a hand. "Spare me the details, Paul. I heard the noise in town. Give me your glass, you're dry."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now let's see, where were we? Oh yes, we were talking about my daughter and your drinking. Tell me something. Has Louise asked you to take the Pledge?"

"No, sir. As a matter of fact, I have avoided Louise since Mrs. Massingale came. Not that it's been hard to do. She's been spending most of her waking time with that woman."

Colonel Gearhart sighed. He was well aware of the fact that garrison life on the frontier offered little in the way of entertainment to a healthy, energetic, intelligent young lady such as his daughter had grown up to be. Certainly there was no society worthy of the name in the new railroad boom town of Cheyenne. To occupy her time, Louise read much more than was good for a young female, and, inevitably, reading gave her ideas which not only were recklessly modern but at times downright dangerous.

"Let me tell you something, Paul. My daughter has reached the age where she feels—ah, restless. It happens to every woman."

"I suppose you're right, sir."

"She needs something creative to do. A husband to take care of. Children to look after. Given these things, she'll have neither the time nor energy to crusade for silly causes like Temperance and Votes for Women."

"I know, sir. But meantime she seems to have fallen completely under Mrs. Massingale's spell. If you had seen the look on her face when she came marching out of the Recreation Hall last night! It was like—well, like she was all lit up inside. Frankly, it frightened me."

Colonel Gearhart laughed good-humoredly. "Then it's just as well you get out of her sight for a couple of weeks. Now run along, tell her good-by, and be on your way. By the time you get back, she'll have forgotten the whole thing."

Although it was not the colonel's usual custom to indulge in more than two drinks prior to the midday meal, he was so troubled by the happenings of the past few evenings and the unexpected amount of publicity they had received in the local press, he unconsciously poured himself a third drink as he picked up yesterday's *Leader* and studied it gloomily. Tonight's lecture by Mrs. Cora Templeton Massingale, he noted, was to be entitled: "HOW WOMEN CAN REMAKE THE WORLD."

An involuntary shiver ran over him. As there were no places in Cheyenne where decent women could assemble, it had seemed but simple courtesy to permit Mrs. Massingale the use of the Fort Russell Recreation Hall for her lectures. He had anticipated a crowd of perhaps twenty or thirty females, most of them soldiers' wives, for the large majority of feminine Cheyenne residents hardly qualified as decent women. How wrong he had been! From every settlement, ranch, stage station, military post, and nester's shanty within a radius of 100 miles, females of all ages, sizes, and descriptions, afoot, in buggies, in wagons, a-horseback, by stage coach, and by train, had come pouring into Fort Russell in a locust-like swarm. And like the locusts that, in this country, now and again dropped down out of the skies to devour everything edible in sight, resistance had been useless.

Eastern newspapers would copy the local dispatches, of course. With the sure and nasty instinct editors had for reprinting exactly what the parties concerned hoped fervently they would not print, it would be reported in New York City and Washington City that the commanding officer of Fort Russell, Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart, had generously made the facilities of his post available to the Woman Suffrage lecturer. The loan of the military band to the rallies would be noted; the demonstration on the parade ground; the impromptu salutes of the fort's cannon. In the lower echelons of the War Department, eyebrows would rise, tongues would wag, and, inevitably, some swivel-chair-mounted major would show the news items to some beefy, bourbioned, brass-bound general and say facetiously, "This is how we fight Indians?"

Crumpling the paper angrily, Colonel Gearhart emptied his glass. Well, the thing was done now and no remedy for it. The best he could hope for was that the woman would give the last of

her lectures tonight and go on her way with no more publicity than she had already received.

To a discreet tap on the door, the colonel called, "Come in!"

"Sir," an orderly said, entering, "there's a lady to see you."

"I'm about to go to lunch."

"It's Mrs. Massingale, sir. She says it's important."

Colonel Gearhart sighed. *Think of the devil!* Whisking the bottle and glasses out of sight, he got to his feet, adjusted his blouse, squared his shoulders, and said, "Very well. Show her in."

Prejudiced though he was, the colonel had to admit that Mrs. Cora Templeton Massingale was not an unattractive woman. Her full but not plump figure was that of a woman ten years younger than her admitted fifty years; it scorned the wasp-waisted, ground-sweeping, bustled, high-fashion dresses that most ladies affected these days and was not noticeably corseted. Her face was pleasant, though determined; her gaze direct, though not immodestly aggressive; her voice strong and clear, though not overpowering. Having borne seven children and buried three husbands, she must have known her share of sorrow and pain, Colonel Gearhart conceded with grudging admiration; yet she seemed perfectly willing to take on more of the world's woes.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Massingale," the colonel said politely.

"Won't you have a chair?"

"Thank you, no. What I have to say is best said standing."

"Our hospitality has displeased you?"

"Not at all. It has been all I had hoped for and more."

"I'm pleased to hear that. What can I do for you now?"

"I have just received a telegram," Mrs. Massingale said, "which disturbs me deeply. It's from Julesburg."

"Oh?" the colonel said warily. "From Julesburg, you say?"

"Yes. I am informed, Colonel, that a train of eighty freight wagons left there yesterday morning bound for Denver, and that you have been asked to furnish a military escort for it. Is my information correct?"

"It is."

"Are you aware, Colonel Gearhart, that the cargo of those eighty wagons is alcohol?"

"No, ma'am. All I was told was that the cargo was valuable."

"Well, now you know. Tell me, Colonel. Are you furnishing an escort?"

"Yes."

"I respectfully request that you reconsider, Colonel Gearhart. In the name of suffering humanity, I implore you either to recall whatever troops you have sent to escort this devil's cargo and let it suffer the fate it so richly deserves, or, better still, order your troops to halt the wagons and impound or destroy the poison they are carrying."

Because his visitor had advanced toward him as she spoke and now was standing only half a stride away, Colonel Gearhart judged it expedient to turn away from her, go to the window, and stare out as if giving serious consideration to the drastic action which she had proposed. After all, there was a limit to how long one could hold one's breath, and in order to inhale one first must exhale.

"Mrs. Massingale, what you ask is impossible," the colonel said at last, turning again to face her.

"Why is it?"

"Because the cargo is a legal one. Because duty requires me to protect legitimate businessmen. Because I have no grounds whatsoever on which to impound or destroy civilian property."

"I feared that would be your attitude."

"Duty is a cruel master, Mrs. Massingale."

"You say you have no grounds on which to seize the train's cargo, Colonel Gearhart. According to federal law, it's illegal to sell whiskey to the Indians, is it not?"

"True. But this train is headed for Denver, consigned, I assume, to legitimate white businessmen."

"How do you know?"

"I'm well acquainted with Mr. Wallingham. He is not the sort of man to traffic illegally with Indians. As a matter of fact, his telegram specifically requested troops to protect his train against attacks by hostile Indians."

"Ah!" Mrs. Massingale said triumphantly. "Then you admit there is a possibility that Mr. Wallingham's poison will fall into the hands of government wards! There's your grounds for action, Colonel Gearhart."

Count on a woman to take a man's words and twist them to mean exactly the opposite of what one intended them to mean! Trying to be both patient and firm, the colonel shook his head. "I'm sorry. There is nothing I can do."

"Very well. Then you force me to take action."

"Of what nature, Mrs. Massingale?"

"You're aware that Mr. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, is not in sympathy with the way the Army is handling the Indian problem, aren't you, Colonel?"

"No," Colonel Gearhart lied.

"And that Mrs. Greeley is a leader in our Movement?"

"Indeed?"

"And that the Movement has friends in Congress, who, were they to be informed of how troops under your command are aiding and abetting the general distribution of alcohol in this area, might make a number of people in the War Department, the Indian Bureau, the Internal Revenue Department, and perhaps even in the executive branch itself most uncomfortable?"

The room seemed suddenly unbearably warm. "You intend to so inform them, Mrs. Massingale?"

"I would regret to do so, Colonel."

"That sounds like a threat, Mrs. Massingale."

"Consider it such if you like. My conscience forces me to make it."

"And mine demands that I do my duty."

There was a silence. Mrs. Massingale's lips tightened. "So be it. May I impose on your kindness for transportation to the Cheyenne telegraph office?"

"Certainly." Showing his visitor to the door, the colonel said to his orderly, "See to it that Mrs. Massingale is supplied with an ambulance and a driver for as long as she may need them." He bowed. "Good day. Call on me again if there is anything further I can do."

Mrs. Massingale's smile was fleeting but gracious. "You are a generous man, Colonel Gearhart. It is not at all difficult for me to understand why your daughter loves you so much. Whatever comes from this, let's still be friends, shall we?"

They shook hands. Closing the door, Colonel Gearhart crossed to his desk, sank wearily into his chair, opened a desk

drawer, and took out the whiskey bottle and a glass. No, he really should not. He must be calm. He must keep control. As a great general once said: "*On the eve of a battle, only a coward drowns his fears in alcohol.*"

Am I a coward? Face it! Am I?

Sighing heavily, the colonel uncorked the bottle.

5

In its brief history, the city of Denver, like all new frontier towns, had suffered a number of catastrophes such as fire, flood, pestilence outbreaks, mob violence, and Indian alarms. Each untoward event had taught the substantial, progressive citizens a lesson which, resolved to its essence, came down to the single word: *Preparedness*. Because fire had once leveled a portion of the city, water reservoirs must be built, hoses purchased, and a volunteer fire company organized. Because another section of the growing metropolis had once been swept down the South Platte following a cloudburst, precautions must be taken to prevent a recurrence of the disaster. To guard against epidemic disease, pharmacy shops must be stocked with such infallible remedies as calomel, quinine, asofoedita bags, and Dr. Parker's Premium Palliative Pills.

An effective Vigilance Committee had long since been organized to keep the roughs in line. A Citizens' Militia had on several occasions proven that, when led by such masters of strategy as Colonel Chivington, it could kill more Indians in less time than an entire regiment of Regular Army troops. Therefore, with such outstanding examples of local initiative to guide them, it was but natural that the saloon owners, recalling the bitter tragedy that had occurred a few winters before when the entire city had gone bone-dry for six weeks during the very peak of the whiskey-drinking season, should band together in an informal association whose primary aim was to make sure that such a catastrophe never happened again.

"Our big mistake was in trusting the weather," the chairman of the meeting had shrewdly observed. "Sure, it's an undeniable fact that two winters out of three, maybe even three out of four, there ain't enough snow in this part of the country to cover up

the grass. But then comes a winter when she hits. And when she hits, by damn, she hits."

Blizzards, it should be noted, invariably were considered feminine in nature because of their unpredictability.

In any case, the result of the saloon owners' meeting had been a Plan. Briefly stated, this Plan consisted of pooling their late summer orders so as to be amply supplied with drinkables no matter how severe the winter or how great the influx of thirsty miners might be, then to negotiate with a freighting company which would give a bonded, ironclad guarantee to deliver said supply to the Denver saloons ere winter came. So far, the Plan had worked perfectly. This year, as has been previously explained, the contract had been awarded to the Wallingham Company.

By mid-November, it was unanimously agreed by all the experts in long-range weather forecasting that the approaching winter promised to be an extremely severe one. Trappers reported that the early pelts they were taking were unusually thick. Buffalo, deer, and bear were feeding ravenously, storing up layers of extra fat. Horses, mules, burros, sheep, dogs, and cats were becoming unusually shaggy and long-haired at an unusually early date. Old men's knees, middle-aged men's necks, and young men's corns twinged, throbbed, and ached ominously.

Even without these sure signs, the wiser citizens of Denver would have accepted the fact that the winter was going to be a bitter one for the plain and simple reason that a wise old man whom they all trusted implicitly had said so.

His name was Oracle Jones.

Because this unique, colorful individual plays such a prominent part in the events to be narrated subsequently, a brief character sketch is in order here. Every frontier community has its Old-Timer. Such a man was Oracle Jones. But, contrary to what is usual with such men, his acceptance, his sphere of influence as it were, ranged far beyond the confines of Denver. In mining towns all over Colorado Territory, in the plains to the east and south, in the Indian-infested mountains to the north and west, he was well and favorably known. In fact, it may truthfully be said that the final authority to be quoted re-

garding any event that had transpired in the West for the past fifty years was Oracle Jones.

Strangely enough, no one could say with any degree of certainty how old he was or where he had been born and raised. In his youth, he had been a mountain man, it was known, a member of that now-vanished breed of wide-roaming free souls that had traced every high-country stream in the West to its source in search of beaver. That he had been on intimate terms with Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, Pegleg Smith, and others of their calling was obvious from the casual way he now and again referred to them in his talk. He had worked as a guide for Fremont; he had led emigrant trains to California and Oregon; he had fought Indians all over the West; he had prospected. In a word, he had been around.

In years, he could not have been less than sixty; yet it is reliably sworn to by innumerable men that his eyesight, his physical endurance, his mental capacities, his nerves, and, most remarkable of all, his ability to absorb any given quantity of alcohol without noticeable outward effect were those of a superbly healthy man half his age.

But the unique faculty that set him apart from other men was this: He saw Visions.

Such a statement at once would label the man a charlatan in civilized society. But on the frontier labels mean nothing. Results matter; means do not. And the reputation of Oracle Jones had been built over a long period of time on the solid foundation that when he said a thing was so, it invariably turned out to be so. If asked how he had reached his eminently correct conclusion, toward which no chain of logic appeared to lead, he would squint off into the distance, shake his head, and say, "Seen a vision." Thus, his name.

Picture, if you will, a saloon full of miners drinking and vehemently arguing over rock structures, pinched-out leads, problems of seepage water, and so on. An old man with a leathery, wrinkled face, long white hair, and faded blue eyes stands dreamily staring down at his glass, paying no heed whatsoever to the gabble of talk around him. The room grows quiet. The attention of every man in it turns to him. At his elbow, a stocky,

red-faced miner motions unobtrusively to the mustached bartender, who wordlessly refills the glass of the white-haired old man; then the stocky, red-faced miner says respectfully, "Oracle, what do you say I'd ought to do about my mine?"

There is a long, pregnant silence. The blue eyes seem vacant, empty. The glass is lifted, drained, put down. Then a voice, remarkably resonant, remarkably deep, says, "Maybe the vein twists left 'stead of right. Dig thataway. Twelve feet. See what you find."

A week later, at eleven feet ten inches—bonanza!

Further illustrations of the peculiar talents of Oracle Jones would serve no purpose here. Suffice it to say that his guesses, hunches, predictions, visions, or whatever one chooses to call them had proven to be correct on so many occasions that the mere suggestion from a tenderfoot that he might be wrong about anything invariably was greeted with hoots of derision. Wherever he wandered, he was welcomed. His lodging, his clothes, his food, his drink, whatever he desired, were provided gratis. Verily, he toiled not, neither did he spin—but never was he in want. . . .

Oracle Jones had predicted a long, hard winter. And that was that.

The *Denver News* reprinted the Julesburg dispatch regarding the Wallingham Train, of course, and great was the rejoicing thereof among the saloon owners, the businessmen, and the idling miners from the high country, a number of whom had already drifted into town. Speculation as to the exact day and hour when the wagons would reach town ran rife, excluding all other topics of conversation. Inevitably, the sporting suggestion was made that a guessing pool be formed, with every manjack paying five dollars and writing his estimated time of the wagon train's arrival on a slip of paper, the winner to take half the pot and the rest to go for eats, drinks, and entertainment in a grand, city-wide "COME ON, WINTER, WE'RE READY!" party.

In the midst of this lighthearted frivolity, it occurred to several frugal souls that it might be wise, before they paid their five dollars and recorded their guesses, to consult with Oracle Jones. When he had been found and properly treated, the spokesman

of the group said respectfully, "What's your prediction, Oracle, as to when that wagon train will hit town?"

The long silence. The lifted, then lowered glass. The faded blue eyes gazing vacant and empty into space. Then a slow, mournful shake of the head. "Might not git here at all."

An exchange of horrified glances. A paling of sunburned faces. Then a tumbling torrent of questions. "Not git here at *all*? Why not? What's goin' to stop it?"

"Dunno. But I seen a Vision. . . ."

It was an accepted fact of life that, once Oracle Jones declared he had seen a Vision, eliciting any further information from him was impossible. Word of his dire prediction spread like wild-fire through the city. The excited discussions that ensued went something like this:

"Oracle Jones says that there wagon train may not git through."

"He's expectin' an early snowfall?"

"Didn't say."

"Indian trouble?"

"Didn't say."

"What else besides weather and Indians *could* keep it from gittin' through?"

"Road agents, maybe. Or tax-snoopers. Or even them Temperance Females that have been raisin' such a ruckus up in Julesburg and Cheyenne. You read in the paper, didn't you, how one of 'em taken an ax to a saloon back in Baltimore?"

"Well, if you want my opinion, no road agent, Injun, tax-snooper, n'r ax-swingin' female is gonna spoil *my* winter! Let's do somethin'! Let's call a miners' meetin'!"

"Good idea! Supposin' you an' Will cover the saloons on 'tother side of the street, whilst Clayton an' me work this side. . . ."

As has been pointed out earlier, the forward-looking citizens of Denver had long since learned that the only sure antidote to catastrophe was Preparedness. So they prepared.

Next morning, a little after dawn, 100 grim-eyed, well-armed, well-mounted men, almost all of whom had in time past done yeoman service with the Citizens' Militia, headed in a northeast-

erly direction out of town to meet the Wallingham Train and see it through.

By unanimous vote, they had chosen as their leader and guide the canny old mountain man, Oracle Jones.

6

HONORABLE H. M. ASHLEY, CHAIRMAN
COMMITTEE ON WESTERN TERRITORIES
SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D. C.

WAGON TRAIN LADEN WITH IMMENSE CARGO WHISKEY
NOW EN ROUTE JULESBURG TO DENVER. SUGGEST YOU IN-
QUIRE GOVERNOR COLORADO WHAT PRECAUTIONS HE TAK-
ING TO PREVENT THIS POISON FALLING INTO HANDS INDIANS
WHO WILL WHEN INTOXICATED MASSACRE WHITE WOMEN
AND CHILDREN. FURTHER SUGGEST COLORADO TERRITORIAL
APPROPRIATIONS BE HELD UP UNTIL YOUR COMMITTEE
SATISFIED.

CORA TEMPLETON MASSINGALE

GOVERNOR WILLIAM GILPIN
DENVER, COLORADO TERRITORY

AM ADVISED BY RELIABLE SOURCE LARGE CARGO WHISKEY
EN ROUTE JULESBURG TO DENVER AND GREAT DANGER OF
BEING TAKEN OVER BY INDIANS. IMPERATIVE COLORADO KEEP
CLOSER CHECK ON UNSCRUPULOUS TRADERS. CANNOT EXPECT
GOVERNMENT TO PACIFY INDIANS AT GREAT EXPENSE IF LOCAL
AUTHORITIES WILL NOT COOPERATE.

H. M. ASHLEY

MAJOR MARCUS BRANDON
FORT SEDGWICK
COLORADO TERRITORY

MISINFORMED WASHINGTON D.C. OFFICIALS ON MY NECK
BECAUSE OF WALLINGHAM FREIGHTING COMPANY CARGO
NOW EN ROUTE TO DENVER. APPRECIATE YOUR WIRING SEN-
ATOR H. M. ASHLEY CARGO LEGITIMATE, PROPERLY ES-
CORTED AND NO DANGER OF FALLING INTO INDIAN HANDS.

WILLIAM GILPIN

GOVERNOR WILLIAM GILPIN
DENVER, COLORADO TERRITORY

JUST RETURNED FROM PATROL SWEEP EASTWARD. CHECKED
WITH EDITOR JULESBURG PAPER REGARDING WALLINGHAM
TRAIN. INFORMATION RECEIVED INCONCLUSIVE AND CONFUS-
ING. INVESTIGATION SEEMS IN ORDER BUT NOT MY JURISDIC-
TION. AM REFERRING MATTER TO WAR DEPARTMENT THROUGH
CHANNELS.

MAJOR MARCUS BRANDON

R. J. TURNER, DISTRICT COLLECTOR
INTERNAL REVENUE DEPARTMENT
YANKTON, DAKOTA TERRITORY

HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE IMMENSE CARGO NON TAX
PAID WHISKEY EN ROUTE JULESBURG TO DENVER. CHECK
IMMEDIATELY, IMPOUNDING IF TRUE. WIRE RESULTS BY
NOON TOMORROW.

ABNER T. MOCK

ABNER T. MOCK, COMMISSIONER
INTERNAL REVENUE DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.

REGRET TO INFORM UNABLE TO COMPLY YOUR REQUEST.
DISTANCE YANKTON TO JULESBURG THREE HUNDRED MILES.
ALSO WISH TO ADVISE JULESBURG NOT IN THIS DISTRICT.
TRY KANSAS.

R. J. TURNER

Bureau of Indian Affairs
Washington, D.C.
MEMORANDUM

Dear Lucius:

Just between you and me, what in the hell is this ruckus about whiskey, Indians, and miners out in Idaho Territory getting involved in a big drunk and massacre all *about*? Senator B—(you know who I mean so I don't have to spell the bastard's name out) stopped me on the street this morning and ripped hell out of me. Said if it were confirmed to him (as he seems sure it will be) that the "soft" policy of the Indian Bureau has been responsible for the burning of Denver, he will mount a personal campaign to abolish the Bureau and turn the whole works over to the Army. All I could tell him, of course, was that I was sure the whole affair had been exaggerated out of all proportion. The truth is, I don't know anything about *anything*! Do you?

Mac

Bureau of Indian Affairs
Washington, D.C.
MEMORANDUM

Dear Mac:

Something has happened, that's sure, but Heaven knows what. Incidentally, Denver isn't in Idaho, it's in Colorado. A friend of mine from out West tells me there is a town in Colorado which is called "Idaho," which may be what confused Senator B. (As if he *needed* to be confused!)

This much I know: the chief got a rush call this morning from H.M. for a conference, and when he came back telegrams and memos flew out in all directions. The Army is involved, that much I'm sure of. Internal Revenue, too. My advice is, just sit tight till we see what's *really* happened. . . .

If you've got no plans for tonight and your wife is still out of town, let me know. I've got some ideas.

Lucius

[*Note by Special Investigator Perry*]: The above-quoted communications are but a few of many obtained and copied by

one means or another by the author of this report. No useful purpose would be served by quoting further items, of which a thick file is available. The only reason that the above documents have been entered into the record, in fact, has been to make the point that distance often leads to misunderstandings.

Let us now return to Fort Russell. . . .

When informed by her fiancé, Captain Paul Slater, that her shopping trip to Denver must be postponed for at least three weeks, Louise Gearhart did not burst into tears, turn pale, wan, and listless, or flutter about like a dove with a broken wing. Much to the captain's surprise, she merely nodded calmly, kissed him calmly, and placidly said, "Good-by, dear. You must do your duty, I know. Be careful you don't catch cold."

Watching the somewhat perplexed young cavalry officer ride off at the head of his company, Louise languidly waved farewell from the porch of her father's quarters, returned to the parlor, seated herself, and eagerly resumed her study of the Cora Templeton Massingale pamphlet: "EQUALITY, A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE FOR WOMEN."

To a delicate, sensitive nature, one of the primary evils of extensive solitary reading is that such a person may become so engrossed in the printed word that all sense of present reality is lost. This was what had happened to Louise. At the very moment when the man she loved and planned to marry had knocked at the door, her mind and emotions had been involved with a fascinating character enacting a poignant scene miles and months removed from this place and time; thus, the departure of her fiancé, the postponed shopping trip, and the weeks of separation had registered but faintly on her fevered mind.

The passage was indeed enthralling. Re-reading it now, she felt her throat swell and her eyes fill with warm tears of sympathy. The passage was as follows:

" . . . and now let me tell you about a most unusual woman who appeared uninvited and unheralded at one of our Rights Conventions in the East. She was a Negro, an ex-slave, and was possessed of the unique name, Sojourner Truth. Our meetings

were being held in a church. Imagine our surprise, that first morning, when we saw a tall, gaunt black woman in a gray dress and a white turban, surmounted by an uncouth sunbonnet, march deliberately into the church, walk with the air of a queen up the aisle, and take her seat on the pulpit steps.

"She said not a word; she simply sat, watched, and listened. Morning, afternoon, and evening sessions came and went; still, she neither moved nor spoke. In addition to the women crowded into the church, a number of ministers opposed to our Cause were present, and, as might be expected, they indignantly protested the presence of the Negro woman. Even the ladies sympathetic to us felt that we were making a great mistake in letting the woman stay; furthermore, they pointed out, we would be committing a fatal error if we permitted her to speak out in meeting. After all, they argued, what could such an ignorant, uncouth, uneducated person *possibly* say that would not do our Cause more harm than good?

"But we did let her stay, for, to be absolutely honest, her physical appearance was so formidable none of us dared attempt to remove her. The second day of the meetings, the debates waxed warm. Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Universalist ministers who had come to hear and discuss the resolutions which we were proposing got to their feet and made inspired arguments in justification of their stand that Woman, by nature, was not Man's equal. Man had the superior intellect, they pointed out. Christ was a man. If God had desired that Woman be equal to Man, would not He have given some token through the Saviour? Was it not through the Sin of Woman that the human race had been cast out of the Garden?

"The women present at the meeting, having little experience in such things, were timid about speaking up and answering the arguments of the ministers. Then suddenly, toward the close of the second day, a gasp of horror and astonishment ran over the assembled crowd. The huge old Negro woman, Sojourner Truth, was getting to her feet. Cries of protest rose from every corner of the church. She paid them no mind; she simply stood there, waiting. Presently a hush in which the drop of a pin could have been heard fell over the audience. And Sojourner Truth began to speak.

“‘Well, children,’ she said in a strong, clear voice, ‘where there’s so much racket there must be somethin’ out of kilter. What’s all this talkin’ about? One man, he say women need to be he’ped over mud puddles, h’isted over ditches, and given the best places in the carriages. Nobody ever he’ped nor h’isted me. And ain’t I a woman? Look at me!

“‘Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns—and no man could head me. Ain’t I a woman? I could work as much as a man, eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well as a man could. And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen ’em all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain’t I a woman?

“‘Another man, he say a woman can’t have as much rights as a man ’cause Christ wa’n’t a woman. Where did Christ come from, you tell me that! Where *did* He come from? I’ll tell you! He come from God and a woman. Man had nothin’ to do with it. Old Sojourner Truth is obliged to you for listenin’. I ain’t got nothin’ more to say. . . .’”

Because her eyes were so filled with tears that she could no longer see to read, Louise put the pamphlet aside, rose, and went to the window, where she stood with her head lifted, her soul exalted, and her mind afire as she dabbed at her eyes with a white linen handkerchief. How marvelously exciting it must be to labor for a Cause, as Mrs. Massingale was doing. To travel, to meet people, to roll back the restricting boundaries of one’s petty little feminine world. . . . Oh goodness me, there was Cora Templeton Massingale this very moment, getting down out of an army ambulance and walking purposefully toward the porch. How shockingly short her skirts were! Six inches above the ground, at least! Daring, true; but so practical!

“Mrs. Massingale, how pleased I am to see you!” Louise exclaimed, opening the door. “Won’t you come in?”

“Thank you.”

“You look exhausted. May I make you some tea?”

“It would be most welcome. I’ve had a trying day.”

By now, Louise had come to accept the fact that Mrs. Massingale was far too busy a woman to waste words or energy on

idle female chitchat, so she waited until the lady lecturer had refreshed herself with a cup of hot tea and had graciously accepted a refill; then she smiled and said, "I'm looking forward so to tonight. The hall will be packed again, I know."

Mrs. Massingale absently nodded. Intently she studied her teacup, pursed her lips, then lifted her gaze in a piercing, questioning look. "Louise, may I make you my confidante?"

"Of course."

"What I'm about to tell you is not frivolous gossip, you understand, to be repeated at the first opportunity."

"You may trust me implicitly."

"Even though my confidence may involve your father?"

"You mean I mustn't repeat it even to *him*?"

"Especially to him. I must have your word of honor."

A delicious thrill ran over Louise. What great fun it would be to know something that her father did not know, to be taken into the inner circle of the Cause, from which all men must be forever excluded! She lowered her voice to a whisper.

"I won't breathe a word to any *man*! I give you my word of honor as a woman."

"Good! Now listen closely. . . ."

As enthralled as a novice conspirator being let in on plans to assassinate the President and take over the government, Louise listened. Although she would have died before admitting it, she at first did not have the foggiest notion of what Mrs. Massingale was getting at. That a freighting train was transporting a large cargo of alcoholic spirits from Julesburg to Denver was simple enough to grasp. That her father had refused to impound the shipment was understandable. That Mrs. Massingale had sent telegrams to Washington City appealing to officials there to use their influence to stop the wagon train—though audaciously daring—was another fact that she could comprehend. But in what direction was all this leading? She had not the remotest idea.

"In view of these facts," Mrs. Massingale concluded, "our course of action is obvious."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, it is crystal clear. We must stop that wagon train ourselves."

“‘We?’” Louise murmured, more than a little terrified. “‘We women, you mean?’”

“Exactly!”

“But how? What can we do?”

“A great deal, my dear, if you will help. Will you?”

“Oh, if only I can! What must I do?”

“Sit still and listen, child. Now here is my plan. . . .”

To preserve chronological order in this report, its author has deemed it wise not to record events until their occurrence; therefore, there is no need at this point to outline the course of action which Cora Templeton Massingale proposed. But this comment should be made: Had Mrs. Massingale been on General McDowell's staff prior to the first Battle of Bull Run and had he possessed the wisdom to listen to her, it is likely that the Civil War would have been shortened by at least two years.

As commanding officer of Fort Russell and unwilling host to the lady lecturer, Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart reluctantly admitted that it was his inescapable duty to attend Cora Templeton Massingale's final speech in the Recreation Hall that night. But he would *not* sit on the platform behind her. Absolutely not!

"Pout all you please," he told his daughter firmly as he poured himself a second before-supper drink. "Beg, scold, burst into tears—it won't bother me one bit. I refuse to give official sponsorship to that Female."

"Please, Father," Louise said, dry-eyed. "Don't call her that."

"Why not?"

"It sounds so contemptuous. And she's really a very nice person, once you get to know her."

"If she's really so nice," the colonel grunted, staring at his daughter as he resumed his easy chair, "how come she drove three husbands to early graves?"

"Father!"

"Well, they did up and die on her, didn't they? I want to know why."

"Alcohol poisoned them. They drank themselves to death."

"So I've heard," Colonel Gearhart said, smiling triumphantly. "And I'll bet you ten dollars to one they weren't drunkards when they married her. They all must have been congenital cowards. They couldn't handle her, so they took the easy way out."

"That's a most unkind thing to say," Louise answered calmly. "Furthermore, it has nothing to do with what we were talking about. You *are* Mrs. Massingale's host. She respects you and is grateful for the many courtesies you have extended her. All she wants you to do is sit on the platform tonight—"

"I won't, by God, I won't!"

"Let me finish, please. You need only sit on the platform, rise and take a bow when she makes acknowledgment of the nice things you've done for her. Is that asking too much, Father?"

Colonel Gearhart squirmed uncomfortably. Since she had come under the influence of Mrs. Massingale, a remarkable change had occurred in his daughter's personality. The sweet-natured, sensitive, gentle child he had sired suddenly had turned into a firm-minded woman with a will of steel. True, her mother—completely feminine though she had been most of the time—had had backbone enough when that quality had been required. But it was startling to see Louise alter so drastically overnight. In fact, it scared the devil out of him.

"My dear," he said in his best military manner, "what you ask is impossible. In the first place, I did not invite Mrs. Massingale to Fort Russell; I simply permitted her to use the only facilities available for what I thought would be a lightly attended series of lectures that might amuse the soldiers' wives. In the second place, I am not in sympathy with the cause she represents. In the third place, my appearance on that platform would make the Army look ridiculous."

"Why?"

"Think what the newspapers would say. That the Army is backing the Temperance Movement and Woman's Rights. That the Army is going to force every soldier to take the Pledge. That the Army favors putting *women—females*, mind you—into uniform. Don't you see how utterly silly the news writers could make the Army look?"

Louise frowned thoughtfully. "What's silly about putting women into uniform? They could be nurses, couldn't they?"

"And nurse *men*, undress *men*, bathe *men*?"

"Would that be worse than marrying men and having babies fathered by men?"

"Louise! What a shocking thing to say!" Getting out of his chair, Colonel Gearhart crossed the room to the sideboard, freshened his drink, turned, and scowled at his daughter. "Is this the sort of thing you're reading in those books and pamphlets Mrs.

Massingale gave you? Is this the kind of poison she's putting into your mind?"

"It's not nearly as poisonous," Louise answered defiantly, "as the whiskey you're drinking right now."

"So you want *me* to take the Pledge! I knew you'd get around to that!"

"No, Father, I won't ask you to change your ways. But I do think you'd feel better and not get out of sorts so often if you were more temperate about your drinking."

"Damn it, I am temperate!" Colonel Gearhart roared angrily. "When was the last time you saw me drunk, answer me that? When did you ever see me take anything more than a medicinal drink to relieve a cold or more than a couple of drinks to relax me after a hard day——?"

"You're on your third drink now, Father. And you're shouting." As he stared at her in consternation, she smiled, came over to him, stood on tiptoe, and kissed him on the cheek. "You're a grumpy old bear at times but you're the only father I've got and I love you. All right, don't sit on the platform if it will make you feel uncomfortable. Just so you're somewhere in the hall. Will you sit on the front row?"

"No!"

"Back row?"

"Absolutely not! All I'll promise to do is stand just inside the door at the rear of the hall. And there must be no parade when the meeting is over, understand?"

"Yes, Father," Louise said meekly. She took his arm. "Come along, dinner is ready. You can bring your drink with you if you like."

After the way he'd been scolded, the colonel, of course, did no such thing. Instead, he finished it in three quick gulps and left the empty glass on the sideboard.

Not counting the Fort Russell band, which Colonel Gearhart reluctantly had permitted to be seated on the platform behind Cora Templeton Massingale, there were only three members of the male sex in the Recreation Hall: the colonel himself; Sergeant Benjamin Buell; and Arthur Nichols, editor of the Chey-

enne *Leader*. Of the three men, only the newspaper editor was there because he wanted to be. Duty required the colonel's presence. A direct order had forced Sergeant Buell's attendance. Morbid curiosity, such as draws emotionally parasitic newsmen to hangings, fires, and like calamities, accounted for the presence, note pad and pencil in hand, of Arthur Nichols.

Throughout the entire two hours of Mrs. Massingale's speech, the editor's pencil had been busy, Colonel Gearhart had observed, and, though he had no way of knowing what the tall, gaunt, stoop-shouldered newsman was scribbling, the cynical smirk on the editor's face struck the colonel as an ominous sign. In the columns of the *Leader*, Nichols had treated Mrs. Massingale courteously enough during her stay in Cheyenne, but, cowardly sneak that he was, the editor could be depended upon to turn loose all the ridicule, satire, and gall stored up in his bilious literary soul once the lecturer had left town.

"And now," Mrs. Massingale was saying, "the hour has come when I must tell you wonderful women good-by. . . ."

"Thank God!" muttered Sergeant Buell.

"Shh!" Colonel Gearhart hissed.

". . . but before I say farewell, it is only right and just that I pay tribute to the person who has made these meetings possible, Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart. Colonel, please come forward and take a bow!"

There was rustle of movement, a turning of heads, a scattering of whispers and giggles as 250 pairs of feminine eyes probed the shadows for a glimpse of the colonel. In response, he took one stiff, short pace forward from the door jamb against which he had been lounging, halted, and inclined his head down and up for perhaps an inch.

"Please, Colonel, come up to the platform so that we may properly thank you!"

The colonel remained where he was. As encouraging hand-clapping rippled through the hall, a thumb rudely nudged him in the back. "Oh, go on up there, Gearhart! The old battle-ax wants to kiss you!"

"I will thank you, sir, to keep your thumb and your vulgar remarks to yourself!" Colonel Gearhart exclaimed, wheeling around.

"My, my! The lady *has* made a conquest, hasn't she?" The cynical smile on the editor's face widened into a leer. "Have you set the wedding date yet, Colonel? You know, of course, that you'll be number four——"

"One more remark out of you, Mr. Nichols, and I'll have you thrown out of this hall."

Sergeant Buell said eagerly, "I'd be glad to boot him out now, sir. You just say the word."

"Colonel Gearhart is shy," Mrs. Massingale said with a smile. "Let's thank him anyway with three big, loud cheers! Ready, ladies? Altogether now:

"Hip, Hip, Hurrah!
Hip, Hip, Hurrah!
Hip, Hip, Hurrah!
Colonel Gearhart!
Colonel Gearhart!
Colonel Gearhart!'"

It had been a soul-chilling experience during the recent war to hear in the cold, damp gray of dawn the Rebel Yell rise from 10,000 throats as Confederate bugles blew the charge. It had been a nerve-shattering experience during later campaigns against the Sioux to hear the death song issue simultaneously from a thousand savage throats as the painted warriors on their painted ponies came sweeping over the crest of a near-by ridge. But neither of these experiences had curdled the blood in Colonel Gearhart's veins as did the high-pitched cheers whose echoes now were dying in the hall.

"How thrilling!" Arthur Nichols murmured, his saturnine face impassive as he jotted a note on his pad. "If only my feeble pen were worthy to describe this moment!"

"Now, sir?" Sergeant Buell pleaded. "I'll boot him clean off the post!"

The damage was done—why make it worse? Shaking his head at the sergeant, Colonel Gearhart turned his attention again to the platform, where Cora Templeton Massingale had resumed speaking.

"Some of your dear women have done me the honor of in-

viting me to come and speak in the outlying towns, military posts, and settlements in which you live. I have had to decline. As I told you earlier, my schedule requires that I return to New York City without further delay. However, since I last spoke to you, something has happened that has caused me to change my plans." Pausing for a moment, she let her eyes roam over the crowd. It was merely his imagination, no doubt, but Colonel Gearhart suddenly got the notion that her gaze had come to rest on himself and that her next words were spoken directly to him. "I have decided to go to Denver."

"Denver?" the colonel grunted, exchanging puzzled glances with Sergeant Buell and Arthur Nichols. "Why Denver?"

"What does it matter?" the sergeant answered, shrugging indifferently. "Just so long as she's out of our hair?"

"Hmml!" the editor said. "Why Denver indeed!"

"Some of you may be wondering why I have decided to go to Denver," Mrs. Massingale continued. "The answer is simple. I am curious. I want to see for myself what Denver men are like."

"Men are the same everywhere, aren't they?" a voice called out from the audience. "All muscle, mouth, and whiskers, with dirty boots on one end and a head stuffed full of conceit on the other?"

At the outburst of laughter which greeted that remark, Mrs. Massingale smiled tolerantly. "I had thought so, yes. But apparently Denver men are different."

"How?"

"For one thing, they appear to be much thirstier than normal men. Why, in order to slake their thirsts this winter, I'm told that at this very moment eighty freight wagons are en route from Julesburg to Denver—loaded with liquor. Think of it! Eighty wagons!"

Colonel Gearhart groaned. "Oh Lord! So that's what she's up to!"

A stout, middle-aged woman somberly dressed in black rose from her seat in the second row. "Are you going to make a Temperance speech in Denver, Mrs. Massingale?"

"I certainly am."

"Don't try it. 'Cause they won't let you."

"Who won't let me?"

"The saloon owners and businessmen. Temperance speeches are bad for business, they say, and the only business Denver has come winter is whiskey-drinking."

"Oh, I'm sure you exaggerate."

"No, I don't, Mrs. Massingale. I used to live there and I know. I lost my man, Will, to whiskey in Denver. He was a good husband, Will was, till he taken to drink. You know where he picked up the habit? Denver saloons. You know who encouraged him in it? Denver saloon keepers. And when I'd go to fetch him home to sober him up and give him a good hot meal, who was it throwed me out time and again? Denver saloon keepers."

"They physically, bodily threw you out? I can't believe it!"

"That's what they done, just the same." The woman in black paused, lifted her widow's veil, dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief, then went on in a quavering voice. "After I buried Will, I tried to organize what few decent women there were in Denver into a Prohibition Society. I didn't get far. First thing I knew, the saloon keepers had me arrested, haled into court, and tried—"

"What on earth did they charge you with?"

"Seditious Utterances or some such thing."

"How ridiculous!"

"Well, maybe it was, but I was convicted anyway. The judge gave me a choice—pay a \$100 fine, go to jail, or get out of town. So I come to Cheyenne."

From all corners of the hall, indignant cries arose.

"For shame!"

"Outrageous!"

"What a terrible thing to do to a poor widow!"

As the woman in black sat down amid thunderous applause, Colonel Gearhart scowled at Arthur Nichols, whose pencil was scribbling furiously. "Do you think she's telling the truth?"

"Who cares? A black eye for Denver is a boost for Cheyenne, isn't it?"

"That's a fine journalistic principle."

"Listen, Colonel, you do the Indian-fighting and I'll publish the news."

Mrs. Massingale was holding up a hand for silence. Though her face was calm, her eyes were flashing. "Now you know why I *must* go to Denver. Seditious Utterances indeed! Do you know what would happen if they haled *me* into court and tried *me* on such trumped-up charges?"

"What would happen?" a voice cried eagerly.

"The word would be spread to every corner of this great nation! Mr. Horace Greeley would hear of it and speak in a voice like thunder! The best legal minds in the country would be employed to defend *me* and the fight would be carried to the highest court in the land! In every village, town, and city from east to west, from north to south, millions of Women would march in protest! The halls of Congress and the White House itself would be besieged! Why, I tell you, ladies, you have no idea what power 3,000,000 enraged Women can exert once they are aroused behind a just cause! We would make the very mountain peaks of Colorado come tumbling down upon the heads of the Denver saloon keepers!"

An ear-splitting wave of high-pitched shrieks of approval made Colonel Gearhart wince. By God, this Female meant business! Well, more power to her. If she went rampaging into Denver and started shaking mountains down onto saloon keepers' heads, the ruckus she had raised here would be small potatoes and soon forgotten by the newspapers.

The audience was on its feet now, screaming, hand-clapping, stomping the floor in a most unladylike manner. At a signal from Mrs. Massingale, the leader of the Fort Russell band rose and took his place in front of his musicians, baton poised and waiting.

"Ladies!" Mrs. Massingale cried, motioning for silence. "Please, ladies—permit me one last word!"

The noise gradually subsided. Colonel Gearhart muttered to Sergeant Buell, "The guard is posted outside?"

"Yes, sir, a whole company."

"All right. Now remember, if it looks like they're starting a parade, we'll go outside and guard this door——"

"There's the back door, sir, the two side doors, and the windows. What do we do about them?"

"We'll watch them, too. It's a mass exit in marching forma-

tion I'm worried about. We must keep an eye on the band. We can't use force on the ladies, of course, but if those damn fool bandsmen get carried away like they did last night, I want them arrested, do you hear, if we have to club them down with rifle butts."

"Yes, sir."

In the quiet that had descended upon the hall, Mrs. Massingale again was speaking. "I cannot tell you how much your enthusiasm means to me. In my heart, I shall carry it with me to Denver. It will sustain and uplift me—whatever happens."

"Mrs. Massingale!" the stout woman in black cried, pushing her way past the standing ladies out into the center aisle, moving down it and across to the steps leading up to the platform, climbing them and crossing to stand at the lady lecturer's side. "I ain't going to let you go into that terrible, sinful city alone! If you'll have me, I'll go with you!"

Thunderous cheers rocked the hall as the two women threw their arms around each other and burst into tears. Suddenly a third woman—slim, pretty, and much younger than the pair standing on the platform—came out of the crowd, hurried up the steps, ran to Mrs. Massingale, and cried in a clear, determined voice, "I'll go with you, too!"

From the rear of the hall, Colonel Gearhart stared in horror. *Louise!* Bedlam ruled now. Women all over the hall were cheering, stomping, clapping, shouting: "I, too! I, too! I, too!" The colonel seized Sergeant Buell by the shoulder.

"I want my daughter taken off that platform, Sergeant!"

"Yes, sir," the sergeant muttered, his normally ruddy face turning pale. "I suppose you do."

"Well, go get her! That's an order!"

Sergeant Buell did not move. Wild thoughts of threatening the soldier with a court-martial, of attempting to fight his way through the mass of women and fetch his daughter off the platform himself, of appealing to the company of cavalrymen outside for help, flashed through the colonel's mind, only to be immediately discarded. No mere man stood a chance of reaching that platform alive.

"How wonderful!" Mrs. Massingale was shouting, her arms

spread wide as if embracing the entire crowd. "We'll *all* go to Denver! Listen! This will be our marching song!"

She made a signal to the band leader. Down came the baton. Snare drums rattled, the bass drum boomed, trumpets and trombones blared, and, suddenly, to the music of the hymn "Marching Upward to Zion," the entire hall was singing:

"We're marching to Denver,
Sinful, terrible Denver!
We're marching onward to Denver—
And we're going to turn it dry!"

Outdoor man that he was, Colonel Gearhart frequently developed painful headaches when confined too long in crowded, poorly ventilated rooms. If caught in their early stages, these headaches could sometimes be eased by his relaxing in an easy chair with his feet elevated, by the application of cold wash-cloths to the nape of his neck, or by the judicious ingestion of a measured quantity of medicinal alcohol. Suddenly aware of a muscle twitch in his left cheek, a usually reliable sign that his head soon would start throbbing, Colonel Gearhart muttered, "Come on, Sergeant, let's get out of here."

Putting a hand on the Colonel's forearm, Arthur Nichols detained him. "You're running away?"

"What do you suggest I do?"

"But this is preposterous, Colonel! It's a hundred miles to Denver! The roads are poor, the weather uncertain, and the country is filled with hostile savages. These are *women*! Weak, frail, helpless *women*! What will happen if they run into a pack of bloodthirsty redskins?"

Firmly Colonel Gearhart thrust away the detaining hand. "God knows, Mr. Nichols. But after what I've seen here tonight, I suggest we pray for the Indians."

9

Lying back in his easy chair with his feet elevated, a cold washcloth on the nape of his neck and a drink of whiskey on the lamp stand close by, Colonel Gearhart was fighting a losing battle with a viciously painful headache when he heard footsteps on the porch. The sound of animated voices and lighthearted laughter grated on his frayed nerves. Wearily he closed his eyes. Steady, now. Be calm. Be temperate. But take firm command of the situation.

Having learned long ago that male illness invariably softens the female heart, he did not rise nor open his eyes as the door opened. He heard the laughter cease abruptly. Steps hurried across the room; then his daughter's hand was tenderly stroking his forehead.

"You poor dear! Is it bad?"

"It's nothing, Louise. Nothing at all." He heard slower, firmer steps, sensed that a second person had paused beside him. "What's wrong with him?"

"He's subject to violent headaches. When they come over him, he suffers so!"

"Hmml He does look ill."

Languidly opening his eyes, Colonel Gearhart gazed up at Mrs. Massingale, feigned surprise, and feebly attempted to rise. "Please forgive my rudeness. I didn't realize——"

"Lie back," Mrs. Massingale ordered crisply. He did so. "Close your eyes." He obeyed. Her cool, surprisingly gentle fingers touched his temples. "Is the pain centered here?"

"Not exactly——"

"Here?" she inquired, touching his cheekbones and forehead.

"No, it's sort of in back——"

"Ah, yes! What's this—a *cold* washcloth? Worst thing in the world for a tension headache." The washcloth was snatched

away. "Bring me a warm, dry towel, Louise—a rough one. Heat some water and put some flatirons on the stove. Once he's in bed, we'll want to make him perspire. We must sweat the fatigue poisons out of his system. And take the whiskey away—it merely aggravates this type of disorder."

Colonel Gearhart's attempt to rise was more enthusiastic this time. "Mrs. Massingale, I appreciate your concern," he said stiffly, "but we *do* have a surgeon on the post—"

"Quiet! Lie back. Close your eyes. Now—empty your mind of all disturbing thoughts. Pretend you're a vegetable. A cabbage—yes, that will do! Be a cabbage."

Just out of spite, the colonel decided he would be an onion. A huge, rank, strong-smelling onion which, when sliced open, would fill the entire room with eye-smarting fumes. He sensed that Mrs. Massingale had moved around behind his chair, that she had worked his unbuttoned blouse free of his shoulders, that her hands were vigorously massaging his neck muscles at the point where that organ was connected to the spine. Involuntarily he winced.

"Tender there?" she asked.

"No," he lied. "Mrs. Massingale, about your march on Denver. . . ."

"Your cords are taut as fiddle strings. Don't fight it, Colonel! Unwind. Let the blood flow freely."

". . . most unwise. . . ."

"Picture the juncture of the shoulder muscles with the base of the neck as a sheath containing a series of ropes, Colonel. Underlying the ropes are pencil-sized tubes. These are the veins and arteries."

". . . weather uncertain, roads poor, distance to consider. . . ."

"Then, deeper, there are the intertwined nerves, like fine silk threads. All are connected with the brain, where the pain center lies. When a person is relaxed, the ropes are flexible, the tubes soft and open, the threads straight."

". . . matters of food, transportation, shelter to be considered. . . ."

"But when one grows tense, the ropes knot up, the tubes constrict, the threads snarl. And the pain center protests."

“ . . . and Indians. Consider my position . . . repercussions in Washington. . . .”

“So we knead the shoulders, massage the neck with a dry towel, encourage fresh blood to carry away the accumulated poisons. Now here, right at the base of the skull, is a key point. We stroke downward, gently, then upward, gently, then downward again. Up, down, up, down, up, down. See? You’re beginning to relax. I can feel it with my fingers.”

Colonel Gearhart sighed. All right; he would be a cabbage. “. . . escort required, of course . . . newspapers would say ridiculous to escort whiskey but not women. . . .”

“That’s right, go to sleep. Bring a blanket, Louise. It will do him no harm to sleep where he is for a couple of hours.”

“ . . . spare a company . . . take charge myself, just to make sure . . . Company ‘D’ . . . that’s the band. . . .”

Gently covering her father with a blanket as his head sagged to one side and he began to snore, Louise stared down at him in amazement, looked up at Mrs. Massingale, and whispered in awe, “Well, I never! How *did* you do it?”

“Experience is a great teacher, my dear. I’ve had a little.”

The hour was late. Noting the lines of weariness now visible on Mrs. Massingale’s face, Louise said impulsively, “We have a spare room. Won’t you stay here tonight?”

“You’re very kind. If I’m not imposing——”

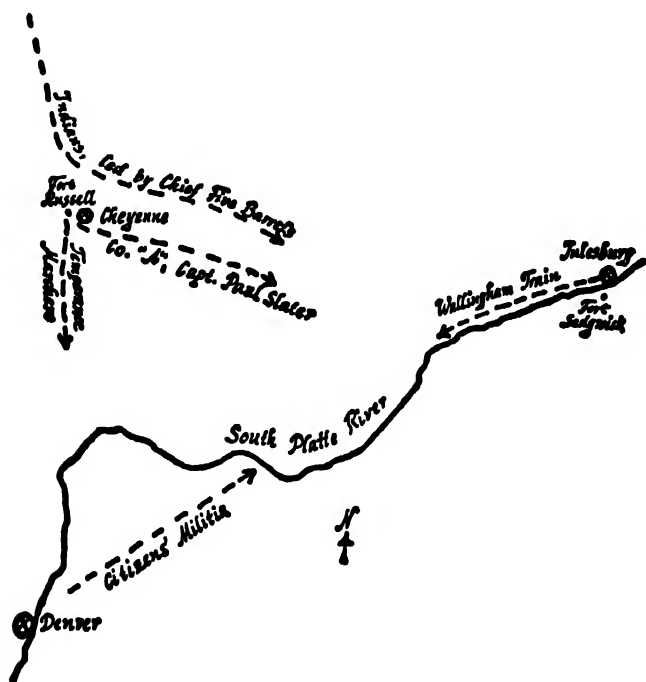
“Truly you aren’t!” Louise took Mrs. Massingale’s hand and led her toward the stairs. Having been in and out of the parlor several times while the lady lecturer was working on her father, she had heard bits and pieces of their conversation but did not know how it had been resolved. “How did he take it—our going to Denver, I mean?”

“Very well.”

“Didn’t he argue at all?”

“The poor dear’s head was hurting him so he couldn’t find the strength to be disagreeable, child. And he is *such* a gentleman! If I understood him correctly, he said that the company of soldiers which is going to escort us will include the band. And he will command it himself.”

Extremely useful at this point would be a brief study of the appended map, which, though it omits minor geographical features, gives one a comprehension of the country in which the subsequently narrated events took place. One inch equals approximately twenty miles:



It should be noted that some groups were aware of the fact that others were on the road, while other groups were not cognizant of the full picture. This led to a certain amount of confusion, as shall presently be seen. In order to get a better grasp of the over-all situation, let us sum up in condensed form each group's knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of the movements of the others, upon which information (or lack of information) future actions were predicated:

WALLINGHAM TRAIN

Definite knowledge only of itself. Because of newspaper article, suspiciously on the lookout for Indians, white roughs, and tax-snoopers. Prepared to defend itself against all hostile forces of moderate size. Rate of travel, barring bad weather, twelve to fifteen miles a day; in mud or snow, considerably less. Reason to anticipate being joined by an army escort the fourth or fifth day out. Immediate concern of leader, Frank Wallingham: Making time and keeping teamsters from surreptitiously helping themselves to cargo.

COMPANY "A"

Aware of date of Wallingham Train departure from Julesburg and approximate route. Not aware nature of cargo. Planning a course aimed to intercept wagon train somewhere along South Platte trail. Immediate concern of leader, Captain Paul Slater: Seeming indifference of bride-to-be to postponement of shopping trip to Denver and bride-to-be's sudden change in personality. Damn it all, her own father had said she would cry!

INDIAN WAR PARTY

Knowledge of departure of wagon train, cargo, and likely route. Word brought in by scouts that company of cavalry seen riding southeasterly from Fort Russell, probably on routine patrol. Later word that huge cavalcade of buggies, wagons, and women riding a-horseback heading south out of fort, destination unknown, escorted by a second cavalry company, led by post commander. Band music heard. Immediate problem of leader, Chief Five Barrels: Try out new rifles in raid on cavalcade or pursue original intent? All-night powwow with medicine men

and sub-chiefs; much heated argument. Final decision: Go for firewater, as originally planned.

CITIZENS' MILITIA

Definite knowledge only that the wagon train had left Julesburg. Ominous suspicion that it never would reach its destination; prepared to see it through despite all obstacles. Greatly troubled because leader, Oracle Jones, not having more explicit visions elaborating on the trouble lying ahead. Immediate concern of leader, Oracle Jones: Thirst. He had thought *somebody* in this rag-tail mob of an army would have had sense enough to load a pack mule with sufficient whiskey to carry him until they met up with the wagon train, but damned if *anybody* had. How could a man have a vision when he was cold sober?

TEMPERANCE MARCHERS

Knowledge of the wagon train, the company sent to escort it, and the thirst of the Denver citizenry. To all intents and purposes, ladies headed not to meet the train but toward Denver. Military leader, Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart, maintaining constant touch by twice-daily couriers with home post of Fort Russell, and, by telegraph, with Washington City, from which telegrams now coming every hour. Questions, orders, threats, advice, pleas, from politicians, civilians, and military superiors; too contradictory to be answered. Message from Major Acree: Sign of large party of Indians seen northeast of post; not sure friendly or hostile. Immediate concern of colonel: Get these women to Denver unharmed. Long-range concern: Explain actions to brass when it's all over.

Civilian leader, Cora Templeton Massingale, making secret plans but keeping them to herself. Most appreciative of loan of sidesaddle and gaited horse from Colonel Gearhart. Touched to learn both belonged to his late wife, whom he seemed to have loved very much. Loss perhaps responsible for his headaches and drinking. Very kind of him to ride beside her and show points of interest in passing scenery. Immediate concern of Cora Massingale: An opportunity to peruse a detailed map of the area and to obtain some accurate advice as to how fast a train of

freight wagons might travel, without rousing the colonel's suspicions. Possible solution to problem: *Louise*.

In the foregoing, a summary of the general situation has been stated. Let us now get down to individual cases.

First, we join the Wallingham Train itself. . . .

Wagon-master for the Wallingham Train was a tall, lank, slow-spoken Kentuckian named Rafe Pike, a man seldom outguessed by a mule, a man who knew his job and did it without fuss. When camp had been made the evening of the third day, he came to Frank Wallingham and said laconically, "Trouble brewin'."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Them Irishmen you hired in Julesburg ain't happy."

"What's eating them?"

"Don't like the workin' conditions. Been holdin' meetin's. Got a list of complaints long as your arm."

Frank Wallingham sighed in exasperation. He had expected this. Long experience had taught him that to be a good mule-skinner a man must be content with his lot in life, have infinite patience, and not be afire with yearnings to remake the world. Mexicans were good with mules and so were farm-raised Americans; thus, most of his regular employees were of this breed. But Irishmen. . . .

The simple truth was, Frank Wallingham had no love for the Irish. Though not renowned for his sense of humor, he would on the slightest provocation tell such jokes as the following:

"What's the first thing an Irish immigrant does when he gets off the boat?"

"Goes to a saloon and buys a drink."

"Right! And the second thing?"

"He buys another drink."

"Right again! And the third thing?"

"He jumps up on a soapbox and makes a speech, declaring himself agin' the governmint."

For the past several years, Frank Wallingham knew, Irish agitators all over the world had been collecting funds, buying arms, and forming secret societies whose chief aim was to free Ireland from British rule. Much sympathy had been given the movement by Americans of all races, but, when asked how *he* felt, Frank Wallingham's inevitable answer was this:

"All right, suppose the Irish are given their freedom? What good will it do them? First off, they'll declare Ireland a Democracy, of course, and give every man the vote. Two elections, with ax handles and whiskey, and they'll wipe out the whole Celtic race!"

But despite his feelings—being in need of additional teamsters—Wallingham had been forced to hire the only help available in Julesburg—fifteen Irishmen laid off for the winter by the railroad. He had expected that they would bicker and grumble. He had known that they would dislike the mules and the mules would dislike them. But he had had no other choice.

Secretly it had pleased him immensely when Paddy Murphy, harnessing a team, had been bit by a mule, had unwisely retaliated by kicking the beast in the ribs, and had then been knocked flying by the heels of the mule's mate, which rightly had resented the abuse. But he was far from pleased by the news Rafe Pike brought him now, for fifteen disgruntled Irishmen could raise a fuss among his teamsters out of all proportion to their numbers.

Flanked by two grim-jawed, determined countrymen, Kevin O'Flaherty, self-appointed leader of the Irish contingent, was approaching. A round-faced, bushy-browed, blue-eyed man of thirty or so, O'Flaherty said politely, "Beggin' your pardon, Mr. Wallingham, might we be havin' a word with you?"

Frank Wallingham controlled his temper, a feat he usually was able to do where business matters were concerned. "Certainly. What's on your mind?"

"Sir, I have here a Petition of Grievances," O'Flaherty said, taking a sheet of paper out of his pocket and unfolding it with a flourish, while his two companions nodded approval, "signed by

fifteen of Your Lordship's employees, statin' in plain and simple terms the conditions of work under which we are bein' forced to labor against our will, and to which, in all due respect, sir, we do hereby most strongly raise formal objection."

Only an Irishman could have gotten that sentence out in a single breath; and it was more admiration for that feat than a desire to give the group's complaints a fair hearing that made Wallingham nod and say, "Go on, I'm listening."

In all, the complaints numbered twenty-two. Wages, food, meal hours, travel hours, harnessing, unharnessing, caring for mules, bedding, guard duty, loading and unloading duties, poor drinking water, poor coffee, lack of a mid-morning and mid-afternoon teatime, order of wagons in line of march, lack of a ration of whiskey to moisten parched throats after a long, dry day—all were thoroughly covered. During the reading, Rafe Pike hunkered on his heels, drawing designs in the dust with a stick; as it came to an end, he lifted his gaze and squinted questioningly up at Wallingham, waiting.

"Is that all?" Wallingham asked.

"Yes, sir," O'Flaherty answered.

"You realize, of course, that it's impossible for me to change some of the things you're complaining about, much as I might like to change them?"

"We're not unreasonable men, sir, but we did feel we should state *all* our grievances—to clear the air, so to speak."

"I'll need some time to think these things over. May I have that petition?"

"Indeed, you may, sir. We struck off several copies."

Taking the piece of paper, Frank Wallingham scowled down at it in silence for a moment, pretending to study it intently. At last he said, "Just for my own information, what happens if I say 'no?'"

O'Flaherty exchanged looks with his companions, each of whom nodded sternly. "Why, in that case, sir, we would be forced to call another meetin' and vote on our next move."

"A strike, say?"

"That's a very ugly word to a workin' man, sir, as I know it is to you. But in truthfulness I would have to say 'twould be considered, yes."

"Well, give me a couple of days."

"One day is all we can allow you, sir. We must have your answer by this time tomorrow."

Wallingham grudgingly settled for that. Waiting until the petitioning committee was well out of earshot, he relieved his feelings with a fluent outburst of profanity; then, as Rafe Pike tossed his stick away, got to his feet, and peered at him expectantly, he grunted, "What would you do?"

"Fire 'em."

"We're shorthanded now. If I gave them the boot, we'd really be in a fix."

"Most of them complaints are hogwash and they know it. If you want my opinion, all they're really after is more money and a daily ration of whiskey."

"Which they'll get only over my dead body!"

"Well, what *are* you gonna do?"

"Stall them off as long as I can. If my telegram to Fort Russell gets any results, we can look for a company of cavalry to join us in a day or so. Then if those damned Irishmen strike, I'll fire the whole lot and put soldier drivers on their wagons. Meantime, let's prepare for the worst. First, we'll post armed guards over the wagons to make sure those devils don't get into the whiskey. Second. . . ."

Had the Civil War lasted another year, there is little doubt but that Paul Slater would have achieved the rank of general. At West Point he had been a brilliant student of military tactics, had graduated fourth in his class, had entered the Union Army as a lieutenant of cavalry at the age of twenty-two, and, by the end of the war, had attained the rank of colonel when barely twenty-six. Because of the reduction in size of the nation's standing army at the war's close, he had of course been reduced to a captain's rating, but, unlike many other young officers in similar situations, he was not in the least bitter.

Although Captain Slater had not delved deeply into religion or philosophy, he possessed a strongly developed personal code of honor. It was his firm conviction that honesty was the best policy; any job worth doing was worth doing well; truth would out; good would conquer evil; and right would inevitably over-

come might. In a word, he was a young man with a clearly defined set of principles, and one of these principles was: *No matter how routine an assignment is given you, carry it out as if the outcome of the final Battle of Armageddon depended upon it.*

Strangely enough, the platoon leaders under him—Lieutenants Jackson and Swain—and the troopers of Company "A" did not regard him as a stuffed shirt; instead, they gave him a loyalty such as only a born leader could inspire. All he asked of them was that they outride, outshoot, and outfight any cavalry company that had ever existed anywhere, and, so long as they made a reasonably sincere effort to do so, regulations, spit-and-polish, and discipline could go hang. The men knew he would tolerate a dirty shirt but not a dirty rifle, an unshaven face but not an uncared-for horse, a slack salute but not a slack saddle girth. In a day notorious for its neglect of the soldier, Captain Paul Slater conducted himself as if a man ought to be proud to be a cavalryman, and, because he expected no less from his men, they had come to act as if they were proud, too.

Therefore, routine though this current mission appeared to be, Company "A" set forth upon it with briskness, alertness, and *élan*. According to the information supplied by Colonel Gearhart, the wagon train to be met and escorted had left Julesburg the morning of November 15. Carefully calculating its likely route and rate of travel and then comparing route and rate of his own column, Captain Slater placed a precise "X" on the map and said, "We will intercept here."

"Around noon, the twentieth?" inquired Lieutenant Jackson.

"More likely late afternoon of the nineteenth."

"Gentlemen, why don't we make this a sporting proposition," put in Lieutenant Swain, who was such an inveterate gambler he would have wagered that the sun would not rise next day, if given sufficient odds. "Each of us will write down his guess as to day, hour, and minute of intercept——"

"For what stakes?" Captain Slater said amiably.

"A round of drinks when we get to Denver."

On his slip of paper, Captain Slater wrote: "Three-fifteen P.M., November 19." As the column made its steady way south-eastward across the autumn-brown, windswept, gently rolling

countryside, a friendly argument developed as to whether "minute of intercept" meant first sighting, first contact, or what. Should the day chance to be clear, Lieutenant Jackson pointed out, it would be no trick at all to spy a wagon train which was yet two hours away.

"And you have the advantage over us, Captain."

"How do you mean?"

"You're in command. You can adjust our rate of travel to fit in with your guess."

"Are you implying, Lieutenant," Captain Slater said with a smile, "that for a mere round of drinks I would cheat on you?"

"You know the adage: 'Among gamblers and thieves, there is no such thing as honor.'"

After prolonged discussion, it was agreed that the payoff minute would be the minute within which Captain Slater presented himself to and shook hands with Frank Wallingham; it was further stipulated that immediately following first sighting of the wagon train Company "A" would ride toward it at a slow trot, that Lieutenant Jackson's dust-proof, snap-cased, twenty-one jewel gold watch would be the official timepiece, and that Lieutenant Swain would observe and record the exact minute of meeting.

Word of the wager soon spread to the troopers, of course, and in no time at all the enlisted men had made up *their* pool, each man risking two bits, the ultimate winner to take half the pot and the other half to be used to purchase a keg of beer in Denver from Sergeant Loudermilk's cousin, a saloon keeper, who would give them wholesale rates. It was typical of Captain Slater that he regarded the troopers' pool not as a distraction, as another commander might have done, but as a sign that the enlisted men were taking a keen interest in their work.

Except for a brief period when the wind died and the sky cleared just before sunset of November 18, low-hanging clouds and wind-driven dust streamers limited visibility to less than two miles; nevertheless, no hostile force could have taken the column by surprise, for sharp-eyed scouts ranged far to fore, rear, and both flanks. Shortly after dark, the eighteenth, four pairs of scouts came into camp with the information that, from

the hilltops they had ascended, they had observed three separate dust telltales or campfire smokes.

Captain Slater and the other two officers listened with interest to the reports. The dust or smoke seen east by southeast, some fifteen or twenty miles away, in all likelihood was raised by the wagon train. But the faint sign seen far off to the southwest and the more distinct sign—smoke, surely, the scouts agreed, ten miles or so off to the northwest—by what or by whom were they made? Prudence required that they be kept under close observation.

"Have your scouts on station by first light tomorrow morning," Captain Slater told his two aides. "If they see anything in the least suspicious, they're to send word to me immediately."

"This late in the year," Lieutenant Jackson said, "all the Indians should be in winter camps, shouldn't they?"

"Yes. But when did you ever know an Indian to do what he should do?"

"I'll make you a bet, gentlemen," Lieutenant Swain offered, "that the party to the northwest is Cheyenne and friendly and the bunch to the southwest is white—miners, likely, headed East for the winter. Drinks in Denver on each guess."

"Done!" Lieutenant Jackson exclaimed.

"Count me out," Captain Slater said, shaking his head. "One round of drinks in Denver and I'm through."

"Taking the Pledge?" Lieutenant Swain asked in surprise. "Before you get married?"

"Not exactly. I'm merely practicing restraint—just in case."

During the night, the clouds returned and the wind built up, so that by daylight visibility was once again restricted and the scouts had nothing to report. As the column moved on, worry put Captain Slater's nerves on edge. The direction of the wind had altered from southwest to northwest. At this time of year, a blizzard could strike at any hour; if one did, mere survival would become problem enough without the further complications of intercepting the wagon train and keeping track of what well might be hostile forces on either flank.

It was exactly 2:18 P.M. by Lieutenant Jackson's watch when one of the scouts ranging ahead of the column rode back to report that the wagon train had been sighted. Making only a slight

correction to the right, Company "A" intercepted the wagons on the flats to the north of the river, and at precisely three-twelve, the company commander swung off his horse, removed his right gauntlet, and said, "Mr. Wallingham, I presume?"

"That's right."

"Captain Paul Slater, sir. Colonel Gearhart sends you his compliments and asks me to inform you that he is most happy to comply with your request for an escort to Denver."

"Good for Colonel Gearhart! I knew he wouldn't let me down!" Glancing over his shoulder at the passing wagons, several of whose drivers had cast scowling looks at the newly arrived soldiers, Frank Wallingham took Captain Slater by the elbow. "Let's have a private talk, Captain. I'm in trouble."

The trouble, Captain Slater learned, involved a group of dissatisfied Irish teamsters, who were threatening to strike, and who could be dissuaded from doing so, Mr. Wallingham felt, by the counter-threat that if they did strike they would be discharged and replaced by soldier drivers.

"Sir, I cannot become an interested party to a labor dispute," Captain Slater said politely but firmly. "My orders are to escort your train, to protect it against attack, and to keep the peace. Beyond that, I may not go."

"All right, I understand. Suppose I don't threaten them? Suppose I just say 'no' to their demands, fire them if they strike, then come to you and ask for help—what will you do?"

"That, of course, would be a different situation entirely. I could hardly let fifteen wagons be stranded for the lack of drivers."

"Of course you couldn't!"

"Not that the Army ordinarily assists merchants in mercantile ventures, Mr. Wallingham. However, in an emergency reasonable aid may certainly be furnished. Looked at from any viewpoint, it would be most unwise to leave your wagons where their cargo might tempt wandering bands of Indians."

"You're absolutely right, Captain!"

"In a general cargo, such as I assume your wagons are carrying, there is apt to be a certain amount of ammunition and arms, which of course the Army would wish to keep out of Indian hands."

"Captain Slater," Wallingham said, "there is something about my train I think you should know."

"Oh?"

"The cargo isn't general—it's specific. Damned specific."

"Indeed? Exactly what is the cargo, Mr. Wallingham?"

Frank Wallingham told him.

A born leader of men should never be taken by surprise, no matter what unexpected event befalls him; and certainly no army officer—a gentleman by definition and by Act of Congress—should ever let his mouth gape open and his eyes stare at a stranger in dumbfounded amazement. But the truth must be set down: Captain Slater was guilty of all these sins. After a moment, he further compounded his lapse from good manners by throwing back his head and laughing heartily right in Frank Wallingham's face.

"What's so comical about it?" Wallingham growled. "A man's got a right to turn an honest dollar, hasn't he?"

"I'm sorry, sir! Truly, I am! But if you were in my place, I'm sure you'd laugh, too."

"Why?"

"One of those lady lecturers—a Mrs. Massingale—has been making Temperance speeches at Fort Russell all the past week. My fiancée, Colonel Gearhart's daughter, was so taken by her that I'm sure she would have forced me to take the Pledge if I had hung around one day longer. Can you *imagine* what she and Mrs. Massingale would say if they knew what I was going to be doing for the next week?"

"There's nothing wrong with taking the Pledge, Captain. I've been a Temperance man all my life."

"You have?"

"Sure. If a man expects to make a dollar in this dog-eat-dog world, he's got to stay sober." Frank Wallingham scowled thoughtfully. "This Female lecturer—she wouldn't take it into her head to come traipsing down here and make trouble for me, would she?"

"Of course not! By now, she's halfway back to New York."

"What about the colonel's daughter?"

"Louise?" Captain Slater said with a chuckle. "Don't fret

about her. You know the old adage, Mr. Wallingham—what a person doesn't know won't hurt them. When I get back to Fort Russell, I'll tell her the whole story. She'll get a big laugh out of it. Louise has a fine sense of humor."

Most white authorities experienced in Indian warfare methods agree that, insofar as strategy and generalship are concerned, the redman's abilities are vastly overrated by the American press and public. In discussing the subject, the experts point out that when an Indian engages in battle three purposes motivate him: (1) Personal Survival; (2) Personal Glory; and (3) Loot. Contrary to the white man's mode of fighting, the Indian warrior never surrenders his individuality to a Leader or a Cause, and few indeed are the cases on record wherein a redman has been known to sacrifice his own life in order that a battle might be won by his people. In a word, faced with unfavorable odds, the Indian does not regard running away as cowardice; he looks upon it as good sense.

True, when Indians decide to go on the warpath they tacitly accept the leadership of a chief—such as the cunning young Sioux, Chief Five Barrels—whose duty it is to lead them toward the objective to be attacked and to formulate a Plan by means of which that objective may be overwhelmed with few, if any, casualties. Invariably the Plan devised by the war chieftain is simple: (1) Approach the objective undetected; (2) Make a surprise attack; or, if detected, devise a (3) Ruse by means of which the defenders of the objective may be lured away by a small portion of the Indian war party while the larger portion remains in hiding, ready to attack, surprise, and overwhelm the now relatively defenseless fount of glory and plunder.

It has been impossible to verify the exact details of Chief Five Barrels' Plan, but the consensus of army scouts consulted later is that, upon sighting the dust telltales of the wagon train in the distance to eastward, he swung his band of 200 warriors directly south, heading for a line of low, bush-covered hills

and draws which here flanked the trail. Eighty wagons strung out single file could not quickly nor easily be circled into a defensible corral, he knew, particularly if attacked simultaneously at all points. Gunfire and war whoops would panic the mules so that their drivers must devote their full attention to controlling them. One swift swoop through the strung-out train, wheel around and dash through it again—and the job would be done.

At the very least, fifteen minutes' work should supply the raiding warriors with scalps, glory, and firewater sufficient for many a moon to come. Perhaps the War Spirits would smile and permit the victory to be complete, in which case a new star would rise in the firmament of Sioux heraldry, and the young leader now known as Five Barrels henceforward would bear the illustrious name Chief Eighty Wagons.

This is mere assumption, of course, though perfectly in keeping with the known ambitions of the person under discussion. However, speculations such as the preceding are somewhat pointless in view of the fact that the battle did not go as originally planned.

The immediate circumstance requiring a change in strategy was the discovery, shortly after the Indian war party had swung southward, of fresh sign of a hundred or so shod horses headed east. That this was a company of cavalry from Fort Russell, that it had made juncture with the wagon train, that its bluecoated soldiers had now been deployed on either side of the wagons in such a manner that a successful ambush would be impossible—all were facts quickly established by the Indians.

Halting his band of would-be raiders, Chief Five Barrels held a long conference with his medicine men and group leaders. As the ceremonial pipe passed around the circle, puffs of smoke and verbal pearls of wisdom wafted into the chill autumn air. Winter was near at hand, some of the more cautious Indians pointed out; perhaps it would be best to go home at once and prepare for it. The representatives sent out by the Great White Father had said war was bad, peace good. Perhaps they were right. And had not Chief Red Cloud himself proven that the Sioux could get anything they wanted from the white man merely by asking for it? Let us go home, brothers, make up a paper, and send it to the Great White Father, whom we know

to be a most generous man. We will thank him for the new rifles he has given us. We will remind him that we have kept the peace. As a reward for our good behavior, we will ask him to send us whiskey. How can he refuse such a perfectly reasonable request?

"My brothers," Chief Five Barrels is reported to have replied, "there is wisdom in what you say. But it takes many moons to make up a paper, send it to the Great White Father, and receive the goods he sends us. The season of bitter cold and deep snows is upon us. Will sending a paper to the Great White Father keep our bellies warm and our spirits light this winter? No! Can we count coups on a paper? No! Can we take scalps, try out our guns, and cover ourselves with glory with a paper? No!"

Approving grunts greeted that speech and encouraged Chief Five Barrels to continue. Among Indians—as among white people—it is customary to applaud brave words, even though the course of action recommended by them be ultimately rejected.

"Listen, then, for I have a new Plan," the chief went on. "All of us except forty warriors will lie in ambush near the trail. The forty warriors, mounted on our fastest horses, will be split into two parties of twenty each. When the wagons draw abreast, the first party will show itself with much yelling and shooting at the head of the train. This will attract the attention of at least half of the bluecoats, who will ride to attack while the rest of the soldiers remain behind to guard the wagons."

Again came approving grunts.

"The first twenty warriors will turn and flee, with the bluecoats chasing them. Then the second twenty will show themselves with much shooting and noise at the rear of the train. That will draw away the other half of the soldiers, for it will never occur to them that there could be more than two parties of Indians."

The approving grunts now were reinforced with nods of admiration, for, truth was, such a complicated strategy had never before occurred to the wildest warrior among them.

"And then, with half the bluecoats chasing the first twenty and the other half chasing the second twenty," Chief Five Barrels concluded, each hand indicating a large body of horseman vanishing toward separate horizons, "those of us who are

left will attack the undefended train." The chief paused dramatically. "Let he who finds fault with *that* Plan propose a better one!"

Not a man present had a word to say.

A piece of military strategy which fails to take into account all possible eventualities has an unhappy way of going awry, of shattering into irretrievable bits, of exploding in the face, as it were, of the master mind that conceived it. This bitter lesson Chief Five Barrels was soon to learn. To give the Indian leader his due, it must be admitted that it would have taken a great deal of imagination on his part to conceive that the Denver Citizens' Militia was hurrying to meet the Wallingham Train and that it was led by a man such as Oracle Jones, whose hunches, though unorthodox in conception, were infallibly right.

On the other hand, it was not at all to the Sioux chief's credit that, having been fully informed by earlier scouting reports that a full company of cavalry and a long column of women were traveling in a southerly direction from Cheyenne, he should have lost touch and assumed that their future movements would have no bearing upon his own plans. But that is exactly what happened. As a famous European field marshal once remarked: "*Of small oversights are great disasters born.*"

At this point, two occurrences—which normally would have had no consequences whatsoever—proved to be the hinges upon which Fate's door swung, and thus must be recorded.

While chopping firewood in the camp of the Citizens' Militia, a man named Ned Ramsey stepped on a rattlesnake. In the camp of the Temperance Marchers, Cora Templeton Massingale—thanks to the efforts of Louise Gearheart—finally got her desired look at a map.

Let us briefly consider each incident and its consequences in turn. . . .

The rattler trod on by Ned Ramsey had not been a particularly large one and because of the coolness of the day had reacted rather sluggishly; nevertheless, it had bitten him. In response to his screams of terror, a dozen fellow militia men rushed to

his aid and did the things normally done in cases of snakebite. First, the snake was killed; second, a rawhide thong was drawn taut around the victim's upper leg well above the calf upon which he indicated having been bitten; third, the victim was carried, moaning piteously, into the main part of camp and made comfortable between blankets; fourth, a vociferous debate began as to what should be done next. Every man present had a favorite remedy for snakebite, but, obviously, ninety-eight different cures—all drastic in nature—could not be applied to one patient simultaneously. Then someone had a happy thought.

"Fetch Oracle Jones! He'll know what to do!"

As was his custom at the end of a day's march, Oracle Jones had climbed to the top of the highest near-by hill, on which he could hunker, smoke, and look over the lay of the land while lesser men tended to the chores of unsaddling, fire-making and supper-preparing. On a clear evening such as this one was, his keen eyes could see into day-after-tomorrow, figuratively speaking, for no dust telltale nor campfire smoke within two days' travel from the hilltop stood the slightest chance of eluding his eagle-like gaze. Like other men of his breed, he seldom condescended to tell his fellow travelers what specific signs he had seen and what he had deduced from them. But of this all his companions were sure: When Oracle Jones looked over the lay of the land, he saw all there was to see and quite a bit more.

When fetched from the hilltop to advise on the snakebite case, he did not trouble to conceal the fact that he was being imposed upon beyond human endurance. Trust a greenhorn fool like Ned Ramsey to get himself snakebit!

"Bile me some water," he grunted. "Heat me a sharp knife. Pull off his boot. And stand back so's I kin see what I got to do."

Ned Ramsey was not a coward, but the shock of having been rattler-bitten, plus the near panic of the men circled around him, had drained every vestige of color out of his normally brown-skinned face. Feebly he whispered, "Have I got a chance, Oracle?"

"Meebee. Meebee not."

"You figure to burn out the poison?"

"Nope."

"You ain't going to cut me, are you?"

"Yep."

"What if it's too late? Seems like I can feel the poison getting to my brain already. Head keeps getting bigger and bigger. Feels like my hands are all swollen up. Heart's beating a sight faster, too." He let out a groan. "Oh, I'm a goner, Oracle! I'm a goner for sure!"

"Not yet, you ain't." Raising his head in exasperation, Oracle snapped, "Pity *none* of you had sense enough to bring along some whiskey. Can't you see the poor devil is dyin' of fright 'fore I kin even begin to git the poison out of him?"

Aware of their great crime, the militia men looked accusingly at one another, muttering vague blame-passing excuses. Ned Ramsey weakly raised his head. "Would whiskey help?"

"Best thing thar is fer snakebite. Any fool knows that."

"There's a full quart bottle in my duffel bag. I was saving it to treat the boys, come Christmas, but if you're sure it'll help——"

With a sigh, Ned Ramsey fainted dead away.

Staring down at the man in disgust while a bystander found the duffel bag and fetched the bottle of whiskey, Oracle Jones recollected that Ned Ramsey was considerable of a moocher. Twice a year—Christmas and Fourth of July—he made a great show of producing a bottle and treating his friends for as long as it lasted, buying liquid good will, as it were, upon which to live between holidays. Letting such a man perish of snakebite would be no great crime, Oracle allowed; still, Ramsey *had* had foresight enough to bring along the whiskey, which was more than could be said for any other booger in this mangy crowd.

Uncorking the bottle, Oracle poured a tin cup half full of "*Tiger's Delight*," lifted Ned Ramsey's head, waited until the pale eyelids fluttered open, then grunted, "Drink!"

As Ramsey gulped and swallowed, envious eyes watched; there was a great intaking of breaths among the onlookers, as if they were wishing *they* had been fortunate enough to get snakebit. Color returned to the pale face; the eyes began to sparkle; the lips twisted into a crooked smile. "Sure helps, all right. Maybe if I took a drop more. . . ."

"Not till I've finished. Lay back. This is gonna hurt a leetle."

The boot and sock had been removed. Rolling back the trouser leg, Oracle squatted with knife poised, his keen eyes searching for fang marks on the white flesh. For some moments he searched, then, with a snort of disgust, he slashed the rawhide thong in two and stood up.

"Ain't a mark on him!"

"What!" Ned Ramsey exclaimed, sitting bolt upright. "You mean I ain't snakebit?"

"That's right."

"But I felt it, plain as could be, I tell you! He bit me right above my boot top! I was tromping through the brush and I heard him whir and I jumped and he got me——"

"More likely a stick got you. Or if he did strike you above the boot top, his fangs never went through your pants. Anyways, you ain't snakebit no more'n I am."

Whether Ned Ramsey fainted this time from sheer relief or merely passed out as a result of the huge slug of whiskey he had downed was never established because of the uproarious laughter and joshing that followed. It was noted, though, that in the confusion the bottle of whiskey disappeared—at about the same time Oracle Jones returned to the hilltop to complete his look at the lay of the land.

Nobody blamed Oracle Jones for being so irritated over the snakebite fiasco that he skipped supper and remained on the hilltop alone until long after darkness had fallen. But certainly it pleased everybody to note that, when he finally did return to camp, he was his usual amiable self again, bearing no grudges.

And he had seen a Vision.

Without going into details, which of course he never did, he announced that all was well with the wagon train so far and that it was less than a day's journey away. However, he added, in his Vision he had seen a force moving toward it from a westerly direction, which it would behoove the Citizens' Militia to intercept, just in case.

"Way I figger, if we cross the river tonight an' head directly north we kin meet the boogers come dawn tomorrow. There's good cover amongst the hills up thataway. We kin lie in ambush an' wait——"

"Shouldn't we warn the wagon train?"

"Might be a good idee, yeah. Pick a dozen men with good hosses. Let 'em ride an' meet the train an' tell 'em we're figgerin' to dry-gulch them hostiles comin' at 'em from the west——"

"Are you *sure* they're hostiles, Oracle? After all, they *could* be a bunch of friendly Indians, couldn't they? Or even white people? What I mean is, you ain't actually *seen* 'em, so a body's bound to wonder. . . ."

The protester was a greenhorn, of course, and as such was quickly shamed into silence. Oracle Jones had said that the force approaching from the west was made up of hostiles—and that settled that.

Hadn't he seen a Vision?

So far as Sergeant Benjamin Buell was concerned, marriage and smallpox vaccinations were in the same category: If they did not take, they did you no good; if they did take, they scarred you for life. Having been vaccinated twice and married twice, with varied results, he felt that at the age of forty-five he was immune to both smallpox and women—and glad of it. Even so, he would no more have volunteered to thrust himself into the company of 250 traveling females for several days and nights than he would have taken up residence in a pesthouse. But duty was duty, and when the colonel said go, one went. Take it all in all, the trip south from Cheyenne so far had not been nearly as trying to his patience as he had anticipated it would be.

For one thing, these women, being in some measure accustomed to frontier life, took discomforts as they came, did not complain, and did not ask to be waited upon hand and foot as ladies from a more civilized society might have done. For another, the weather was not unpleasant, the rate of travel was leisurely, and the women themselves were in a cheerful though purposeful mood, seeming determined to enjoy this unusual break in the monotony of their lives as something in the nature of a prolonged picnic. And, as he invariably did when in personal command of an expedition, Colonel Gearhart kept a firm grip upon all aspects of the venture.

Wild fowl and venison brought in daily by the hunting parties added variety to the usual army diet, as did the hams, canned

fruit, preserves, pickles, jams, and other home-prepared delicacies with which the provident ladies had amply stocked their buggies and wagons. Instead of depending upon the army cooks to prepare their meals, as Eastern female guests would have done, the frontier ladies took over the major share of the cooking chores themselves, much to the digestive delight of troopers accustomed to bully beef, bacon, and beans. Each evening, the band played, songfests were held, impromptu humorous skits were staged by the grateful soldiers, and there was even a bit of decorous dancing.

Sergeant Buell knew his place, of course, thus was most reluctant to dance with the colonel's daughter until laughingly pressed to do so with such insistence that it would have been the height of rudeness to refuse her. Afterward, blushing to the roots of his hair as she complimented him upon his nimbleness of foot, he helplessly let her guide him over to a tent before which Mrs. Massingale sat on a camp stool, writing a letter by lantern light.

"Did you ever *see* such a marvelous dancer!" Louise exclaimed. "And I had to *beg* him so!"

Mrs. Massingale smiled as she laid down her pen. "Count on a modest man to be a capable one, my dear. Still pools are deepest."

"Well. . . ." Sergeant Buell said, by way of making conversation. "Well. . . ."

"Incidentally, Sergeant," Mrs. Massingale said, "I don't suppose you know how far we've come from Cheyenne, do you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Could you find a map and show me where we are?"

"Don't need a map, ma'am. I can draw you one."

"Really? Please do!"

Taking up the pen, Sergeant Buell quickly placed an "X" on a sheet of paper, labeled it "Cheyenne," marked down another, which he labeled "Denver," drew a dotted line leading from the first-named town toward the second, then neatly lettered in an "O" approximately halfway between the two "X"'s. "Here's where we're camped, ma'am."

"How interesting! And where is the South Platte River?"

He drew it in. "The river runs something like this."

"Where would Julesburg be?"

"Here."

"Well, I do declare! I was all turned around in my directions, but now you've made it seem so simple!" Her eyes twinkling, Mrs. Massingale looked chidingly up at Louise. "You see, my dear—you're completely wrong! Captain Slater and his company *will* get to Denver before we do and you won't be able to surprise him after all because he'll read in the paper that we're coming——"

It was really none of his business, Sergeant Buell knew, but he hated to see anybody draw false conclusions from a map he'd drawn, even freehand. "Excuse me, Mrs. Massingale, but we'll be in Denver at least a week before Captain Slater gets there."

"Oh?" Mrs. Massingale said dubiously.

"Yes, ma'am. You see, the captain has to cover more than twice the ground we do. Not only that, but them freight wagons he'll be escorting will be loaded heavy and traveling slow."

"Where do you think they are by now?"

Versed as he was in the logistics of heavy transport, it was no trick at all for Sergeant Buell to make some rapid mental calculations, place a precise "X" on the map, and say with complete confidence, "Barring serious breakdowns or other troubles, I'd bet dollars to doughnuts they're camping tonight right here."

"Why, that's on a direct line east of where we are, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"But you're *sure* we *will* reach Denver before the wagon train does?"

"By a week, at least."

Exchanging looks, the two women giggled like little girls sharing a secret too personal and silly to be confided to adult men. Louise exclaimed excitedly, "Then we *can* surprise Paul, can't we? Oh, I'll bet he just drops dead when he sees me!"

Poor *Captain Slater*, Sergeant Buell mused as he politely excused himself and left the ladies to their childish plotting; he sure *would* be surprised when he rode into Denver with eighty wagon loads of whiskey and learned that his bride-to-be and 249 other ladies had been making Temperance speeches for a week in an effort to turn the city dry. Well, it was no skin off his own nose. No skin at all.

Both Louise Gearhart and Cora Massingale stopped giggling the moment the sergeant was out of sight. In silence, they studied the map he had drawn for them, looked soberly at each other; then Louise said hesitantly, "You're sure it's the thing to do?"

"Positive. In Denver, we could do nothing but make speeches. Confronting the wagon train while it is yet a week away from Denver, the issue will be squarely between us and them."

"Do you think we can actually make the train turn back?"

"Heaven knows, my dear. But we can try."

"When do we tell the other women?"

"Tonight. We'll spread the word quietly. There's no need to upset your father any sooner than we have to."

"When do we tell *him*?"

"After breakfast tomorrow morning. We'll wait until the horses are harnessed, the conveyances loaded, and everyone's ready to break camp. Then we'll tell him."

"He'll just explode! I know he will!"

Mrs. Massingale's smile was calm, though bleak. "I hope not fatally, Louise. But what must be done, must be done."

"Who's going to tell him—you or me?"

"I wouldn't dream of asking you to do it, my dear." Gently she patted Louise's hand. "Whatever comes of this, child, let the coals of wrath fall on my head. I'm used to having men explode in my presence. Quiet determination turneth away wrath, as the Quakers say. When we're ready to travel, I shall simply go up to him and say, 'Colonel Gearhart, we have changed our plans. . . .'"

In the early part of the morning, Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart was never at his best, mentally speaking, until his digestive juices had gone into full production and a brisk walk or ride had started the blood to circulating through the higher seats of judgment in his brain. Thus, when Mrs. Massingale came up to him and quietly said something regarding a change of plans, his first reaction was a rather sluggish one.

"You mean you want to go back to Cheyenne?"

"No, Colonel. We want to go meet the wagon train."

"But you *are* going to meet it, Mrs. Massingale! That's why you're going to Denver!"

"We want to meet it long before it reaches Denver, Colonel."

"Impossible!"

"On the contrary," Mrs. Massingale replied with an infuriatingly calm, determined smile, "it is quite simple. By heading east instead of south, I am reliably informed by a person who knows the country, we can intercept the train on the South Platte River trail at least a week before it reaches Denver."

"What person told you that?"

"That is immaterial, Colonel Gearhart. But what *is* material is that we are turning east immediately and we are going to meet that wagon train."

A half minute's exchange of pleasantries with Mrs. Massingale, the colonel noted with no great enthusiasm, had done far more to stir up his digestive juices and circulatory system than an entire morning of brisk walking or riding ever had accomplished. In fact, his higher seats of judgment were functioning far more actively at this moment than they had functioned for years. Keep control, he told himself. Do not raise your voice. Remember the old adage: "*In a clash of wills, he who shouts loudest is lost.*"

Very coldly and matter of factly, he said, "If I understand you correctly, Mrs. Massingale, you are proposing to lead your ladies eastward to meet Mr. Wallingham's train in the unsettled plains country along the South Platte River trail. Right?"

"Exactly."

"Upon meeting the train, I surmise, it is then your intention to put on some sort of demonstration whose purpose will be to turn back the wagons or cause Mr. Wallingham to have a change of heart as regards supplying the citizens of Denver with alcoholic spirits. Right?"

"Precisely."

"You would be wasting your time. Frank Wallingham is a Dutchman—the stubbornest Dutchman ever born."

"And I am a Swede, Colonel," Mrs. Massingale replied, smiling sweetly. "The Swedes invented stubbornness."

That Colonel Gearhart could well believe. "Suppose your demonstrations don't affect him? Suppose your stubbornness

finds him indifferent? Suppose he keeps his wagons moving in spite of all you can do? What then? Will you and your ladies try to stop his wagons by force? Or will you lie down in front of them and dare them to run over you?"

"I am not quite sure *what* we will do, Colonel Gearhart. But I do thank you for that last suggestion, which, so far as I know, Temperance Marchers have never tried."

There was a long, pregnant silence, during which Colonel Gearhart became acutely aware of the fact that every officer and enlisted man in Company "D" was watching and listening intently, waiting to see if he would lose his patience, his temper, or his nerve. Gazing past Mrs. Massingale, he saw Louise standing ramrod-straight, her face drained of color but her chin up, her eyes unaverted, her mouth determined; obviously she had made her choice and was backing her commander heart and soul, as a loyal subaltern should. A wild impulse to seize her, turn her over his knee, and give her a sound spanking came to the colonel, only to be instantly rejected. This was no time to act like a father.

"You realize, Mrs. Massingale," he said quietly, "that if you undertake this most foolish mission, you take the consequences upon your own head?"

"In other words, Colonel Gearhart, your troops will no longer escort us?"

"Exactly. Escorting a group of civilians from one city to another—even though their mission be a questionable one—is duty within my authority. But by no stretch of the imagination could I justify chasing around the countryside with 250 hare-brained Females who are determined to halt legitimate freight traffic by throwing themselves under the hoofs of mule teams."

"Colonel, I think you're bluffing."

"Try me! You'll see!"

"I can see this fact quite clearly, Colonel: If you force us to go our way unescorted—and harm comes to us—3,000,000 infuriated women will turn the War Department upside down!"

"Your choice of words is unfortunate, Mrs. Massingale. As God is my witness, if I could *force* you to do anything—which I obviously can't—it would be to go home and stay home, where all decent women belong!"

Cora Massingale's face turned quite pale and for the merest fraction of a second her lower lip appeared to quiver. In any other woman, Colonel Gearhart would have taken that as an infallible prelude to the use of the deadliest of all female weapons—tears—but Mrs. Massingale obviously had too much steel in her to cry.

"Good-by, Colonel Gearhart. Thank you for all the courtesies you have extended me—especially the use of your late wife's horse, which I shan't take along, of course. I would never forgive myself if harm came to it." Turning briskly away, she climbed into a waiting buggy, surveyed the silent, grim-faced women watching her, then called out in a clear voice, "Are you with me, ladies?"

Two hundred and forty-nine enthusiastic voices replied that they were with her to the last woman.

"Then let's go!"

Whips cracked, hoofs thudded, wheels turned. Curbing their mounts sharply to prevent them from joining the general movement, the troopers of Company "D" took off their hats, waved them in the air, and cheered lustily—had there been time, Colonel Gearhart did not doubt, the musical instruments would have been unlimbered and the ladies sent on their way with a stirring march.

"Silence in the ranks!" he cried.

Silence in the ranks was what he got. A drawn-out, lengthening silence, during which all eyes watched the most unmilitary column of vehicles moving eastward out of camp, circling the base of a ridge, then disappearing from sight. At the colonel's elbow, Sergeant Buell muttered hoarsely, "My God, Colonel, she wasn't bluffing, was she?"

"We'll see."

"Were you bluffing, sir?"

"I never play games with women, Sergeant," Colonel Gearhart said irritably, "for they never abide by the rules." He hesitated a moment, then snapped, "Tell the men to unsaddle. We'll remain in camp here for a while—just in case the ladies get cold feet."

"What if they don't, sir?"

"Put a squad of scouts on their trail. Tell them to keep out

of sight but to maintain constant touch with both the ladies and this command. Should the ladies run into real trouble, we'll go to their aid, of course."

"Do you think they will run into trouble, sir?"

"How could they?" Colonel Gearhart said brusquely. "There isn't a hostile Indian or white man within fifty miles."

As all students of military tactics will verify, the most successful generals are those who have second thoughts, whose minds are fluid enough to modify original decisions, and who, above all, are capable of devising totally new concepts of strategy suited to fit unexpected conditions. Such a man was Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart. Restlessly pacing about the camp as the morning waned, his higher seats of judgment remained constantly active as his brain grappled with any number of second thoughts and searched desperately for a way out of this present dilemma.

And a dilemma it certainly was. Frank Wallingham had powerful friends in Washington City, he knew, who could do the colonel's career no end of harm if it appeared that troops under his command had given aid and comfort to Female Temperance Marchers. On the other hand, should the ladies get into real trouble between this spot and their meeting with the Wallingham Train, the indignant question would be asked by an outraged public: *Where was the Army?*

Where, indeed! Ah, now, perhaps *that* was the key. Suppose, gentlemen (Colonel Gearhart said to the imaginary board of strategy conferring in his mind), that our squad of scouts were to keep in constant touch with the ladies and this command, as already set up; that, further, as the ladies travel eastward, this command were to move in that direction also—not close enough to be seen by them, but close enough to render quick assistance, if needed? Does this not alter the picture? Does it not disassociate the Army from the Temperance Marchers, yet at the same time afford the ladies the protection which is the right of all civilians?

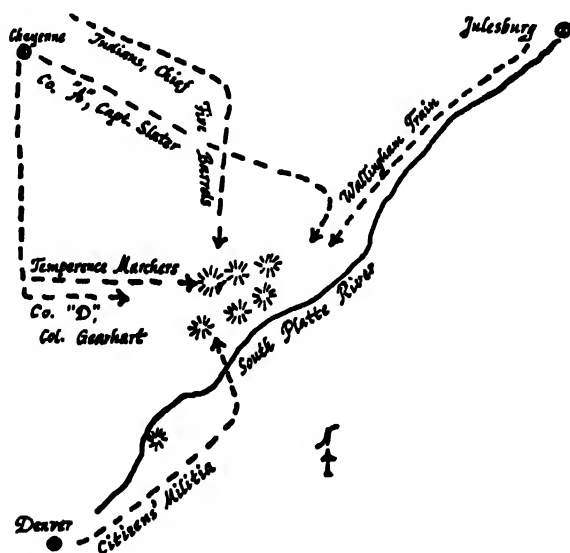
Indeed it does!

Now what shall we call this brilliant new tactic we have de-

vised? *Hedging One's Bets*? Hardly! Ah, gentlemen, I have it! We shall call it—and it shall so be recorded in military journals—*Detached Contact*.

Let the necessary orders be drawn up. . . .

Recommended at this point is another brief study of an area map. Because distances no longer are as important as the location of the various groups, the following diagram has not been drawn to scale:



Three important facts should be noted: (1) With the single exception of the Wallingham Train itself, each group has made a sudden change in the direction of its march; (2) The various groups are destined to meet in the same specific area; (3) This area consisted of a series of low hills and hollows which, though supporting no trees, were covered with sufficient bushes and thickets to hide a large number of men and horses.

Most important of all, at the very hour when the meeting of the various groups took place, the strengthening northwest wind had whipped up a sandstorm of such intensity that visibility was extremely limited.

Thus, the Battle of Whiskey Hills was fought under very adverse conditions. The word "battle" has been used advisedly. Admittedly, no great amount of blood was shed. But a careful search of Webster's International Dictionary of the English Language, (1864 edition) reveals no more appropriate word. When one stops to consider the size, arms, and intent of the forces involved, synonyms such as "engagement," "skirmish," "encounter," "brush," "conflict," "fray," and "affair" are at once seen to be totally inadequate. Therefore, the word "battle" is the only word that will do.

In retrospect, it seems incredible that so many different forces could become involved with one another in so small an area without becoming aware of the over-all situation. But as all students of the recent Rebellion know, even simple battles between well-defined forces—which are crystal clear in retrospect—often are complete chaos to the participants at the time.

How does the objective writer make sense out of chaos? After long study of the problem, this narrator has concluded that the synopsis form used earlier in this report is best.

The reader's close attention is earnestly solicited. . . .

WALLINGHAM TRAIN

Camped previous night some three miles east of hills through which trail runs. Showdown between Frank Wallingham and Irish teamsters; Petition of Grievances rejected *en toto*. Secret meeting held by Irishmen, course of action decided upon should proper opportunity offer itself, signal for action to be given by leader, Kevin O'Flaherty.

Day dawns gray and windy; Wallingham concerned because mules notorious for disliking to travel when sand whipping into their faces; train starts out, nevertheless. Irish teamsters delay harnessing so that fifteen wagons under their control are at rear of train. As sandstorm increases and visibility lessens, O'Flaherty judges this proper opportunity, gives signal, fifteen wagons driven by Irish teamsters separate from train and bear off

to the northwest: Purpose, to get "accidentally" lost, delay train, and so harass Wallingham he will give in to demands.

Discovering wagons missing, Wallingham halts train, confers with Captain Slater; while conferring, group of dozen white men ride in with alarming news large hostile force approaching from west and that Denver Citizens' Militia lying in ambush to dry-gulch it. Squad of soldiers goes in search of missing wagons; rest of Wallingham Train corrals and, assisted by Captain Slater and Company "A," prepares to defend itself.

CITIZENS' MILITIA

After all-night forced march, reaches hills north of river an hour before dawn, takes position on bush-covered slopes directly south of draw through which the trail runs and lies in wait for whatever action daylight may bring.

TEMPERANCE MARCHERS

Having sighted dust telltales of wagon train far to eastward previous evening, break camp early and hasten toward it. Mrs. Massingale quite proud of fact women remain cheerful despite worsening sandstorm, through which they are now driving blind.

COLONEL GEARHART, COMPANY "D"

Pursuing predetermined policy of Detached Contact, camps a few miles west of Temperance Marchers, also breaks camp early, steps up pace of company to close gap, as he fears growing storm may make trouble for ladies.

WALKS-STOOPED-OVER

Cheyenne group leader in charge of First Twenty, whose duty it will be to make feint at head of wagon train and then lure escorting soldiers away in westerly direction, gets his warriors in position before dawn along the bush-covered slopes directly north of draw through which trail runs and lies in wait for whatever action daylight may bring.

ELK RUNNER

Arapaho group leader in charge of Second Twenty, whose duty it will be to make feint at rear of wagon train and then

lure escorting soldiers away in easterly direction, gets his warriors in position before dawn and lies in wait for whatever action daylight may bring.

CHIEF FIVE BARRELS

In charge of main Indian War Party. With First Twenty to his right and Second Twenty to his left, gets his warriors in position on slopes to north of draw through which trail runs, then patiently waits for daylight. Reviews his carefully laid plans; can find no flaw.

WALKS-STOOPED-OVER

Sandstorm now raging so fiercely he can barely see his own group of warriors; cannot see trail at all. Hears horses and wheeled conveyances moving into draw below; they seem to be coming from west instead of east, but, knowing how ears play tricks on one in sandstorm, Walks-Stooped-Over mounts horse and signals charge. Whooping wildly, shooting blindly, First Twenty rides down slope, then swerves sharply to right in maneuver to lure soldiers away. Not sure of results but Walks-Stooped-Over thinks charge has turned blood of white men to water. Had they not squealed like women?

TEMPERANCE MARCHERS

Utter panic as teams bolt and women scream. Though terrified, Cora Templeton Massingale keeps her head. Hanging on for dear life as buggy driven by Louise Gearhart lurches forward out of control, Mrs. Massingale rallies her forces with a voice made strong by years of lecturing in huge, noisy halls: "Sing, ladies! Sing!"

Amid the gloom and tumult, 250 female voices substitute a rousing hymn of united hope for unorganized cries of terror:

"We're marching to Denver,
Sinful, terrible Denver!
We're marching onward to Denver——"

ELK RUNNER

Hearing distant shots and war whqops, which he judges to mean that the feint has been made on head of wagon train,

and, hearing nearer the creak of wagon wheels and the shouts of teamsters, the leader of the Second Twenty signals the charge. Whooping wildly, shooting blindly, the Second Twenty gallops down the slope, then swerves sharply to the left in a maneuver to lure soldiers away. Elk Runner not sure of results, though he thinks highly successful, for he has gotten a split-second glimpse through swirling sand of a redheaded teamster crossing himself and rolling his eyes toward the skies as if the end of the world were at hand. Much regret on Elk Runner's part that he cannot linger to take red-haired scalp, a trophy long yearned for.

IRISH TEAMSTERS

Wheel wagons around and drive with all possible speed toward main body of train recently deserted. First concerted action taken this trip not preceded by meeting, speeches, and vote.

CHIEF FIVE BARRELS

Pleased that his well-conceived Plan is working so perfectly, he mounts his horse and signals the charge. Whooping wildly, shooting blindly, 160 thirsty warriors charge down the slope toward the draw.

CITIZENS' MILITIA

Something is happening—that much is clear—though no one is sure what. But Oracle Jones has said that the approaching force is hostile, so hostile it must be. Hunkered down behind whatever cover they can find, 100 men begin firing blindly into the draw below.

TEMPERANCE MARCHERS

Can hear bullets whining over their heads from the slopes on either side of the trail. Have no way of knowing that their horses' bolting in panic at the initial charge of the First Twenty has saved their lives by taking their vehicles through the draw between the hills before the main War Party makes its attack. All the women can do is hang on and sing. So they hang on and sing for dear life:

“We're marching to Denver!
Sinful, terrible Denver——”

COLONEL GEARHART, COMPANY "D"

Hears shots, Indian yells, and female screams directly ahead. Orders bugler to blow charge. Confusion in ranks as horses break into gallop, some troopers unlimbering carbines, others—mistaking nature of bugle call in high wind of sandstorm—unlimbering band instruments. Out of nowhere, twenty Indians blunder squarely into cavalymen. Confused meleec of hand-to-hand fighting before Indians break clear and vanish into murky day. Casualties minor on both sides, though Private Dunham positive he skulled thrce redskins with his slide trombone. . . .

And then the wind died, the air cleared—and the Battle of Whiskey Hills was over.

Let us now analyze its results. . . .

In the opinion of Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart, the problems faced by the federal government immediately following General Lee's surrender to General Grant had been relatively simple compared to the perplexing questions facing him now. True, there had been a Cessation of Hostilities. All the forces involved in the recent conflict had retired to their respective camps in sight of one another along the valley of the South Platte and were keeping the peace as they cautiously watched one another and debated their next move. But negotiating a mere Backing Off for Regrouping—which the colonel was acutely aware this present quiet was—into a permanent and satisfactory Peace was apt to be an extremely difficult process.

That the Temperance Marchers had suffered no injuries more serious than bruises and fright, that no fatalities had been incurred among the Indians, teamsters, Citizens' Militia, or troopers, were events for which to be profoundly grateful, of course. In his report of the affair to the War Department, he would minimize the amount of shooting done, he confided in Captain Slater, but, personally speaking, he regarded it as a miracle of the highest order that so many bullets could have missed so many people in such a small area in such a short space of time.

"Mrs. Massingale says the Lord had a hand in it," Captain Slater replied. "She says it shows that the Lord is on her side."

Colonel Gearhart refrained from saying that if the Lord were as well acquainted with Cora Massingale as *he* was, He would not dare oppose her.

By now, the day was half gone. With the dying of the wind, the dust had settled, the sky overhead had cleared, and, though ominously dark cloudbanks could be seen hanging above the mountain peaks in the distance to the west, the weather gave

promise of holding fair for the next day or two. As military commander of the district, the colonel had ordered that there be no fraternizing between Indians and whites, no firearms discharged, no whiskey consumed, and no traveling done for the remainder of the day. These were completely arbitrary edicts, he realized, which he had no solid authority to enforce, but, for the time being at least, they had been accepted.

However, come dawn tomorrow, Frank Wallingham would insist on traveling, he knew, and the moment the wagon train took to the trail all sorts of actions and counter-actions would take place. Which meant that if Peace were to be made and Reconstruction to begin, the Articles must be negotiated and agreed to during the remaining hours of this day.

"Captain Slater," he ordered with an outward decisiveness that would have deceived any fellow officer but a future son-in-law, "our duty is crystal clear. We must keep the peace. In this extremely ticklish situation, we must be understanding but firm, sympathetic but fair, impartial but decisive. Do you agree?"

"Absolutely, sir."

It was the mark of a good subordinate officer that he could keep a perfectly straight face and maintain a respectful tone of voice even though he knew his commander was stalling. It was also his duty to speak up if he had any ideas. Glancing at Captain Slater out of the corner of his eye, the colonel noted with disappointment that keeping a straight face and maintaining a respectful tone of voice seemed at the moment to be the only ideas Paul Slater possessed.

"Therefore, our first step must be to call a conference of the leaders of the interested parties," Colonel Gearhart continued. "You will contact them, Captain Slater. You will convey my respects and say I request them to meet with me here at 2 P.M. sharp. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. I'd better make a list." Taking notebook and pencil out of his pocket, Captain Slater frowned. "Let's see now. There's Frank Wallingham, Oracle Jones, Mrs. Massingale, Chief Five Barrels, Kevin O'Flaherty—"

"Who the devil is Kevin O'Flaherty?"

"Spokesman for the Irish teamsters in the wagon train, sir."

They're very unhappy with working conditions and are threatening to strike."

"That's Wallingham's problem, not ours."

"Exactly what I told him, sir. But there are complicating factors. For example, if they do strike, are fifteen wagon loads of whiskey to be left behind to fall into the hands of the Indians or should army personnel be assigned to drive the wagons?"

"Neither alternative need be considered. Let Wallingham hire some of that Denver Citizens' Militia rabble as drivers."

"I suggested that to him, sir. He flatly rejected it."

"Why?"

"They're the worst bar flies in Denver, he claims. It would take three soldiers watching each man around the clock to keep them out of the cargo. Which brings up another problem, sir—who would watch the soldiers? Our supply of Temperance Men is extremely limited."

Colonel Gearhart groaned. His eyeballs ached, his tongue felt like a piece of cracked leather, and the muscle in his left cheek was beginning to twitch. What he wouldn't give, right now, to be back at Fort Russell lounging on his easy chair with his feet up, a drink near at hand, and Cora Massingale's gentle fingers rubbing . . . no, damn it, a cold damp cloth on the nape of his neck!

"All right, Paul," he said wearily. "Let everybody come to the conference that wants to come. And I might as well tell you the truth—beyond letting them all speak their piece, I haven't got the vaguest notion what we're going to do."

Although the conference lasted four hours and was conducted most fairly and firmly by Colonel Gearhart, beyond some remarkably fine oratory by Chief Five Barrels, Mrs. Massingale, and Kevin O'Flaherty, it accomplished little worthy of being recorded in this report. In truth, it may be said that there was no spirit of compromise present, lacking which, of course, there could be no meeting of minds. However, a brief summary of the sentiments expressed by the spokesman for each group, although already known to the reader, should be stated at this point in order that ensuing events may be clearly understood. The following notes have been excerpted, with only

minor editing, from the journal of Captain Paul Slater, who acted as official secretary for the conference:

FRANK WALLINGHAM. Says he is a legit. biz man and whiskey legit. biz. Has contract to deliver whiskey in Denver and by G— going to do it come H— or high water. As taxpayer and good Repub. entitled to army escort and by G— he'd better get it or will raise H— in War Dept. Says Indians, Women, Militia, and Irish troublemakers all ought to go back where they belong and if don't duty of Army to see do.

COLONEL GEARHART. Says appreciates Mr. W.'s feelings but will not tolerate use of profanity with Ladies present. **F.W.** Says apologize for profanity but otherwise sentiments expressed stand.

CHIEF FIVE BARRELS. Says he and all his band good Indians and have paper signed by Great White Father to prove same. Not on warpath but on game hunt. On trail of buffalo herd this morning when attacked without cause by Army and Militia. Says is custom when meet with Peace Commissioners to be given presents. Where are they?

COL. G. Says this not official Peace Commission meeting but if Indians behave selves and go home he will report same to G.W.F. [Great White Father: Ed.]

CHIEF F.B. Says talk fine but deeds better. If given small token of good faith, will take warriors home. Suggests twenty wagon loads whiskey.

F.W. Makes profane outburst; reprimanded by Col. G.; apologizes to Ladies.

MRS. MASSINGALE. Makes long speech; usual Temperance stuff. Says if Army permits Indians, Militia, or Denver saloon keepers to get whiskey, Movement Friends in Wash. will raise Cain. Suggests dumping whiskey in river. Says if wagons try to roll on toward Denver tomorrow, Women will take firm action, nature not stated.

F.W. Tells Col. G. his duty to restrain women from firm action.

COL. G. Tells F.W. he out of order.

KEVIN O'FLAHERTY. Says wants to read resolution signed by Irish teamsters.

COL. G. Tells K. O'F. he out of order.

ORACLE JONES. Moves recess with F.W. treating crowd.

COL. G. Denies motion. F.W. seconds denial.

O.J. Says has simple solution for whole mess. Let Women go on to Denver and make Temperance speeches. Let Army escort Indians back to home grounds. Let Irishmen go back to Julesburg. Let Citizens' Militia escort wagon train to Denver.

COL. G. Says most sensible compromise. Asks for those in favor to show hands. O.J. in favor; all rest opposed.

K. O'F. Requests to be recognized; is. Reads resolution containing fourteen points. Col. G. again warns F.W. about use of profanity.

COL. G. Declares ten-minute recess so that army surgeon may treat headache.

The above excerpts from Captain Slater's journal should suffice to illustrate the fact that the area of agreement, to coin a phrase, among the involved parties was small indeed. Because the discussion during the remainder of the afternoon was simply a restatement of previously expressed attitudes, there is no need to detail it here. However, Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart's closing speech to the assembly was so admirable a delineation of his position—which admittedly was a most difficult one—that simple justice requires that it be set down verbatim:

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said understandingly but firmly, sympathetically but fairly, impartially but decisively, "much as I am tempted to wash my hands of this whole mixed-up affair, duty dictates otherwise. And that is exactly what I am going to do—my duty. Nothing more; nothing less. During the course of the afternoon, all of you have been most generous in your gratuitous advice to me as to what my duty is. For that kindness, I thank you. But from this moment on, I intend to listen only to my own conscience."

"Bravo!" Cora Massingale exclaimed, impulsively clapping her hands. "I knew you'd be with us!"

"I am with no one and against no one," the colonel con-

tinued, frowning a reprimand. "As I see it, my duty as a soldier is to protect property——"

"Right as rain!" Frank Wallingham exclaimed.

"—to protect civilians in the legitimate exercise of their constitutional rights——"

In unison, Kevin O'Flaherty and Oracle Jones expressed approval of that statement.

"—to protect government wards——"

Chief Five Barrels gave a satisfied grunt.

"—and to prevent violence." Colonel Gearhart paused significantly. "That, ladies and gentlemen, is exactly what I intend to do, whatever happens. The conference stands adjourned."

All persons present agreed as they prepared to go their separate ways that Colonel Gearhart's closing speech had been a masterful one. Exactly what it had meant, no one could say—least of all the colonel himself. But it certainly had been a gem.

15

In his time, Oracle Jones had on occasion met men who were too tightfisted, small-souled, or mean-natured to share their drinkables with a thirsty wayfarer, but in his expert opinion Frank Wallingham topped them all for downright stinginess. A body would think that the owner of eighty wagon loads of likker would show *some* gratitude to the farsighted person who'd gone to the bother of having Visions, raising a rescue party of public-spirited citizens, making an all-night forced march, and then fighting off hordes of hostiles in a raging sandstorm in order that Wallingham's precious cargo might be saved, now *wouldn't* he? He shorely would! But Frank Wallingham hadn't even troubled himself to say thank you, let alone bestowed some small token of liquid esteem upon his prime benefactor.

Well, Oracle mused as he prowled restlessly about the darkening camp, that was human nature for you. But there were other ways to kill a cat besides drowning it in hot butter. He'd never yet stooped so low as to ask a man for a snort of likker, no matter how dry he was, and he wasn't about to start now. He'd do the fair thing. He'd pay Frank Wallingham a friendly call, give him one last chance to behave like a decent man should, then, if he didn't, other ways and means would have to be considered. While he was circulating about, Oracle further decided, he'd do a mite of visiting amongst the soldiers, the Ladies, and the Injuns, too, just to see how their sticks were floating.

Scattered along the flats flanking the north bank of the river were the fires of five separate camps, each watchfully eying the others with varying degrees of suspicion. Farthest to the west lay the camp of the Denver Citizens' Militia; weary and saddle-sore from lack of sleep and last night's long ride, most of the militia men had rolled into their blankets directly after supper

and already were sleeping the sleep of the just. A hundred yards to the east the freight wagons of the Wallingham Train were drawn into a tight circle, well lighted inside by cooking fires and by lanterns hung on each wagon, while outside guards armed with repeating rifles constantly paced their beats. As Oracle Jones approached, he was sharply challenged.

"Hey, you! Where you goin'?"

"Gotta talk to Wallingham."

"'Scuse me, Oracle—didn't recognize you at first out here in the dark. Go right ahead."

The old mountain man accepted as his natural due the fact that the guard had recognized him and spoken to him in a tone of respect. Though he didn't recall that he'd ever even seen the man before, he lowered his voice and muttered confidentially, "Lissen, Buck. Keep a sharp lookout, hear? Some of them Denver boys are hard drinkers an' mighty thirsty. An' you know how soldiers are. Jest no tellin' what *some* men'll do fer whiskey."

"You kin count on me, Oracle."

"Shore you got enough guards?"

"They's ten of us standin' watch every trick. We got orders to shoot first an' ask questions later."

"Good fer you, Buck. Ain't nothin' makes trouble like whiskey. I'll tell old Frank you're on the job."

Molasses catches more flies than vinegar, Oracle mused as he clambered over a wagon tongue chained to a wheel and strolled into the enclosure; and it's safe to call any man "Buck" 'cause it makes him feel tough and mean. Ten guards, eh, fer eighty wagons? Hell, this'll be easy! Jest wait till the campfires die. . . .

When he put his mind to it, Oracle Jones could be a mighty obliging person, for he'd long ago learned the Indian trick of never expressing a definite opinion on anything until he found out what it was his questioner wanted to hear, then, with a great show of thoughtful solemnity and wisdom, he'd tell him exactly that. Hunkered down before the fire with Frank Wallingham and his wagon-master, Rafe Pike, sipping the cup of coffee (unlaced, damn his mean-hearted soul!) offered him, he was not long in discovering the two worries on Wallingham's mind.

"What's the weather going to do?"

"Ought to hold fair fer two, meebie three days."

"And after that?"

"Could be we'll get a mite of snow."

"If it's a real blizzard, we'll be in bad trouble," Wallingham said uneasily. "Well, we'll face that when it comes. Right now, the big thing that bothers me is—what are them fool women fixing to do?"

Outside of a few casual squaws picked up and mislaid here and there during his years of wandering about the West, Oracle Jones had had no experience whatsoever with women and what made them behave or misbehave the way they did, but, considering the question now, he reckoned that the principles that'd served him so well in building up his reputation as a seer in other fields would work just as well in this one. Keep your eyes and ears open, pay more attention to what's meant than what's said, mull it all over with a relaxed mind opened up to the wisdom of your inner voices by a proper amount of alcohol—then make a wild guess. Sure, it took practice, a knowledge of human nature, and a certain amount of blind luck, but there were ways to skin out of the times you guessed wrong; and you'd be real surprised, when you worked at it, how many times you guessed right.

"Why, I tell you, Frank," the old mountain man said slowly, "what I was of a mind to do was drift over to that Female camp an' do some jawin' an' listenin'."

"They'll throw you out on your ear!"

"Don't think so. After the meetin' this afternoon I kind of let on to that head Female, Mrs. Massingale, I was the Worst Old Sinner in these parts. She got a kind of look in her eye. So I thought meebie if I wandered over there now an' give her a chance to convert me—"

"She'd let you in on their plans?"

"Not deliberately, no. But you know how squaws are. When their tongues git to waggin', their brains fall out."

"By God, Oracle, you're real cagey," Wallingham grunted approvingly. "I'm mighty obliged to have you on my side. Here, let me pour you another cup of coffee."

"No, thanks," Oracle said. "More'n one cup of coffee this

time of night is apt to keep me awake." He paused significantly. "Ain't near as keen on coffee as I used to be."

There being no suggestion forthcoming from Wallingham regarding an alternative beverage, Oracle Jones stood up and took his leave. Talk about inhospitable people! Mighty glad I'm on his side, is he? Wal, it'd jest serve him right if the old skinflint came up missing a whole wagon tomorrow morning, 'stead of jest one leetle old barrel!

The next stop for the old mountain man was the camp of the soldiers, where he lingered a brief while chatting with his friend, Colonel Gearhart, for whom he had worked as a guide during a campaign or two, and young Captain Slater. Even though the colonel was suffering from a headache, his greeting was cordial.

"You've been on my mind, Oracle. In fact, the captain and I were just talking about you."

"Figgered you was."

"How?" Captain Slater asked curiously.

"Seen a Vision. What's troublin' you, Colonel?"

"How well do you know this Sioux devil, Chief Five Barrels?"

"Tol'ble well."

"Is he as mean as he makes out he is or is he mostly made of wind?"

"I'd say it's all accordin'," Oracle answered, knowing that that was about as safe an answer as a man could make.

"According to what?" the colonel persisted.

"To who prods him and how." Oracle paused, watching the officer closely though not appearing to. "You got somethin' in mind?"

"As a matter of fact, we have," Colonel Gearhart answered, exchanging glances with Captain Slater. "We've been discussing the advisability of giving him an ultimatum: 'Go home or surrender your arms and consider yourselves our prisoners.' In your opinion, what would be his response to such an ultimatum?"

"Could be he'd fight," Oracle said slowly, after giving the matter due thought. "Or could be he wouldn't. He's a mite crazy, you know. Quite a boozier, too, when he kin git it. An' them bucks are mighty proud of their new rifles."

Colonel Gearhart nodded. "I'm glad to have your estimate of him, Oracle, which, incidentally, exactly coincides with mine. Now I'm wondering if you would do me a great favor——"

"Shore, Colonel," Oracle said without waiting for the officer to name it, "I'll be glad to mosey up to that Injun camp an' see what kind of mood they're in. Figgered you'd want me to. Jest why I dropped by."

Colonel Gearhart gave Captain Slater a triumphant look. "Didn't I tell you he was psychic, Paul?" Extending his hand, he shook the old mountain man's warmly. "By Heaven, Oracle, you're a good man to have around! If there's ever anything I can do for you, don't hesitate to let me know!"

Well aware that the colonel was no tectotaler and that he usually packed a mite of headache remedy with him, Oracle started to say, yeah, there is *one* thing you can do right now, then thought better of it. After all, he'd stood being dry this long, he could endure it a spell more. And his next port of call was the Female camp. . . .

The Ladies looked mighty weary after their long, trying day, but his welcome by Mrs. Massingale was quite as friendly as he had predicted to Frank Wallingham it would be. She even made him a cup of tea, ignoring his polite protest that tea drunk so late in the evening was apt to keep him awake.

"Nonsense, Mr. Jones! Tea is a soothing drink. You'll sleep like a baby."

"If you say so, ma'am, I'll shore try, though I ain't been a baby fer 108 years."

"Oh, you're not that old!" Mrs. Massingale said with a laugh. "Let's see, you told me this afternoon that you guided the first missionary party containing women to Oregon when you were twenty-five years old. That would have been in '36. Thirty-one plus twenty-five—why, Mr. Jones, you can't be a day over fifty-six."

Now and again you ran into an Easterner with a good memory for dates and figures, Oracle brooded over his tea, and when that happened and they made you out to be five years old when you killed your first buffalo or seventy-eight years old when you won your first foot race with an Injun, the best thing to do was scratch your head, look vague, and mutter something about

your memory not being what it used to be. They'd accept that. What they would not accept, of course, was your admitting point-blank that the yarn you'd told 'em was a lie from beginning to end, because what else was an old ex-mountain man good for, these days, if it wa'n't to entertain Easterners with the kind of personal experience yarns they wanted to hear? Truth was, not meeting many Females, he hadn't had much chance to polish up that Woman Missionary yarn, but he'd work on it from now on out, because it sure had gone over big with Mrs. Massingale.

"All I remember now," he said humbly, "was how kind an' good an' holy them Women Missionaries was and how fer years afterward I kept thinkin' what a sinful life I was leadin', drinkin' an' fightin' an' stealin' an' the like——"

"Stealing, Mr. Jones? You didn't tell me about that. What on earth was there in the wilderness for you to steal?"

"Injun hosses. An' Injun women—though mostly we bought them, ma'am, with hosses we stole from hostile Injun tribes. Why, I mind once, they was a leetle Shoshone gal that caught my eye——" Breaking off abruptly, Oracle took another gulp of tea. "No, I don't reckon I'd ought to tell you that story, ma'am. It ain't exactly fer gentle cars."

Mrs. Massingale's calm blue eyes glittered with an interest she made no attempt to conceal. "You might be surprised, Mr. Jones, what indignities these supposedly gentle ears of mine have endured without permanent damage. But the hour is late. Is there anything in particular I can do for you?"

"For *me*?" Oracle said, horrified. "Why, no, ma'am! I jest come here to see what I could do for you!"

"That's very kind of you."

"Like havin' the boys fetch in firewood or water or harnessin' up for you, come mornin'. They're a crude-lookin' lot, I will agree, ma'am, but scrape off the outside crust an' they got hearts of pure gold. Why, soon as we made camp a committee come to me and said, 'Oracle, do you suppose them Ladies need anything——?'"

Shaking her head, Mrs. Massingale cut him off crisply but not unkindly. "No, no, Mr. Jones—Colonel Gearhart has seen to it that our creature needs are being cared for quite adequately,

thank you. But tell your 'boys,' as you call them, I am *most* grateful for their thoughtfulness."

"I shorely will, Mrs. Massingale."

"Are most of them young—under thirty, for example?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Bachelors?"

"Practically every one."

"Away from home for the first time," Mrs. Massingale murmured, half to herself. "Lonely, impressionable, reckless, venturesome——"

"You've tabbed 'em right down to their gizzards, ma'am. It's jest like you'd knowed 'em since they was little boys."

"They are *still* little boys, Mr. Jones." She pursed her lips. "Perhaps we could reach them through their hearts rather than through their minds. If we could convince them that we are not against them but *with* them. . . ." The words trailed off into silence. For some moments the silence was unbroken, then, coming suddenly to herself, Mrs. Massingale smiled brightly. "You've been a great help to me, Mr. Jones. More tea?"

"No, thank you, ma'am. It's late and I've got a couple of things to do. . . ."

"We'll be talking together again, I hope—and soon. Good night, Mr. Jones."

Well, Oracle mused as he strolled through the dark toward the twinkling campfires of the Indian encampment, *some* of the things he'd told her had been true, hadn't they? Like most of the boys being young, bachelors, and having hearts of gold under their outer crusts? Trouble was, getting the crust off to get down to them golden hearts was like extracting precious ore veined through quartz—it took a sight of blasting powder before your work began to pay—if ever it did. No matter. If he'd calculated right, giving them Females some faint hope they could turn good-for-nothing bar flies into plaster saints would let the wagon train travel in peace for a day or two.

Now if he could just convince that crazy young Sioux hellion, Chief Five Barrels, that he was on *his* side, too. . . .

"Listen to me, Friend of my Father and Blood Brother to the Sioux," Chief Five Barrels said in his native tongue, which Ora-

cle Jones understood quite as well as he did English, "the ways of the White Man are known to me. When I killed the evil trader and took his firewater, was I punished? No. When Chief Red Cloud and his warriors made war on the bluecoats and killed many of them, were they punished? No. The Great White Father sent out Peace Commissioners with a paper, which we signed, and as a reward we were given presents and new rifles. Do I not speak with a straight tongue?"

"Sure. But this situation is different."

"How is it different?"

"Well, for one thing," Oracle said slowly, weighing his words with great care, "the minute you and your bucks jump *these* wagons, you're going to have two companies of cavalry and a hundred volunteers on your necks. You just might get the worst of the fight."

"The Great White Father would be very angry. We have a signed paper that says we are good Indians. It is against the law to harm good Indians. The Peace Commissioners told us so."

"You've got the wrong angle on this thing," Oracle said patiently. "Killing whiskey peddlers and soldiers in your own part of the country is one thing, but riding way off your natural stomping grounds to attack a wagon train engaged in legitimate trade between white people is something else again. In fact, it's the worst crime in the books."

"Why?"

"Because it's interfering with free enterprise, that's why! And that's the one crime no man—white, red, or black—can commit in the United States and get away with."

Chief Five Barrels frowned thoughtfully. "If this is true, why do the white squaws say they are going to stop the wagon train?"

"Well, that's another law we got—a body can say most any damn thing he pleases. It's just when he *does* something he gets in trouble."

"The White Squaw Leader says the firewater should be poured in the river. Her followers are many. If they *do* this, will they be killed?"

"There'll be a mighty big ruckus, I'll tell you that. But, no, I doubt that any of 'em would be killed."

"Would their noses be cut off?"

"Not hardly."

"Would they be stripped naked and whipped?"

Wearily Oracle shook his head. "Civilized people like us don't do them things, Blood Brother and Son of my Friend. To us, women are—well, sort of a special breed of people. Kind of precious, so to speak. Valuable."

"Like a good buffalo horse?"

"That's the idea, yeah. Something a man feeds good and treats extra good on account of they're not only purty to look at but mighty useful to have around."

A gleam of understanding flickered in the chief's dark eyes. To an Indian, a woman was merely a woman, but only once in a lifetime did a man acquire a truly fine buffalo horse. "What price is set by the white man on a good White Squaw?"

"That's kind of hard to answer."

"Try, Blood Brother. One rifle? Five rifles? One barrel of whiskey? Five barrels of whiskey? How much is a White Squaw worth?"

When palavering with Indians, Oracle Jones had learned long ago, it was always a fatal mistake to let on you noticed when a new idea soaked through their skulls. In the first place, it flattered their vanity to think that their secret thoughts were unreadable; in the second place, if *they* got the notion that you had got a notion as to what their new idea was, they wouldn't do anywhere near the thing you expected them to do. So Oracle just shrugged carelessly and said, "Whatever who wants her thinks she's worth, Son of my Old Friend." Yawning, he got to his feet. "I'll be talking to you again tomorrow. Just don't do nothing rash, is my advice. 'Scuse me—I got one more call to make 'fore bedtime."

To a man of Oracle Jones' experience, talents, and abilities, the purloining of a single thirty-gallon barrel of whiskey proved to be so ridiculously simple and easy that, for a moment there in the darkness of the wagon, he was greatly tempted to take a second barrel, just for the sheer pleasure of it. But even as the temptation came to him, it waned. The rule of the mountians was: *Never kill more game than you can eat before it spoils.*

What if Frank Wallingham is stingy? That's no excuse to be

greedy, old hoss! One barrel will do you fine between here and Denver. 'Cause, truth is, the way things are shaping up you'd better keep a reasonably sober head on your shoulders. Lord knows how many Visions it'll take you to pull these pilgrims through.

Rolling into his blankets a short while later, Oracle Jones fell into a deep, peaceful sleep, disturbed neither by Frank Wallingham's coffee nor Mrs. Massingale's tea.

Much to Colonel Gearhart's surprise, the Wallingham Train got under way after breakfast, next morning, without the slightest difficulty of any kind. How long Peace would last, what Plans were being concocted by the leaders of the various antagonistic groups, and what permanent effect the sly machinations of Oracle Jones (which the old mountain man had gleefully reported to him) would have were questions with which he did not trouble his mind now. It was sufficient to know that Oracle Jones was his ally, that Oracle Jones had somehow managed to gain the confidence of the leaders of all groups, and that Oracle Jones had given these leaders the notion that they could more easily achieve their aims by guile than force.

"The first step in all Peace Negotiations," the colonel pointed out to Captain Slater, "is persuading the parties involved to abjure the use of Force. This is basic. Right?"

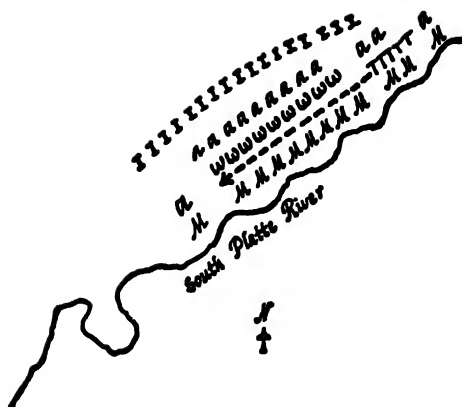
"Absolutely, sir. But what is the second step?"

"Their acceptance of the use of Reason."

"And the third?"

"Damned if I can remember now," Colonel Gearhart answered gruffly, a bit irritated by the literal-mindedness of his future son-in-law. "It's been a long time since I studied that sort of nonsense. And it doesn't matter anyhow. In this crowd, we'll be lucky if we can stay on step one."

Wishing to minimize opportunities for friction between the various groups, Colonel Gearhart set up the order of march as shown in the following diagram:



Code: "I"—Indians
 "A"—Army
 "W"—Wallingham Train
 "M"—Citizens' Militia
 "T"—Temperance Marchers

It was Colonel Gearhart's original suggestion that the Temperance Marchers take a position ahead of rather than to the rear of the train, in order to avoid the discomforts of dust, but Cora Massingale crisply declined his effort at gallantry.

"In the remote event we ladies *do* go into Denver with this devil's cargo, Colonel Gearhart, let it not be said that we *led* it on its way for even so much as a mile. Let its dust cover the shame on our faces."

Spying on women was a deed so mean and debased that, prior to this present tour of duty, Colonel Gearhart would have been horrified at its mere mention. But he was well aware of the military adage that an Army uninformed of the movements of the Enemy is an Army unarmed. Therefore, much as he regretted the necessity for it, his orders to Captain Slater were firm and specific.

"Captain, between now and our reaching Denver you will make it your personal, primary interest to supply me with up-to-the-minute intelligence reports regarding the actions and intentions of Mrs. Massingale and the ladies accompanying her——"

"But, sir—I"

"Don't interrupt, Captain. Find out what they're saying, who they're saying it to, what they're thinking—or at least what you *think* they're thinking——"

"Sir—I"

"I know, Captain," Colonel Gearhart said coldly. "You would like to remind me that they are ladies, that you are a gentleman, and that you happen to be in love with one of their group. Spare me such a reminder, please, for in reply I should simply say that my own situation as regards them differs not a particle from yours."

Captain Slater looked surprised. "Really, sir? Are you in love with Mrs. Massingale?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" the colonel snapped angrily. "It was my daughter I was referring to. There is no law against a father loving his only child, is there, even though she has temporarily lost hold on her reason?"

"No, sir, of course not. But the way you first phrased your statement, I thought——"

"That's all, Captain. Be about your duties."

One excellent piece of knowledge she was acquiring from acting as Mrs. Massingale's aide, Louise Gearhart mused as she drove the buggy in which she and her commander-in-chief rode at the head of the Temperance Marchers, was a better understanding of the relationship that existed between her husband-to-be and her father. In time past, she had often become extremely vexed with Paul because of the unbending stiffness of his deference toward her father. It had seemed to her that as practically a member of the family Paul could forget to click his heels, snap to attention, salute, and say "Sir" *once* in a while. But no amount of scolding, teasing, or ridicule on her part had changed the captain's manner toward his superior officer in the slightest degree.

Now Louise understood why. A Leader must live in a world apart, must plan, weigh choices, and make decisions. To do these things effectively, a Leader must be protected from outside distractions at all times. Familiarity was a distraction, thus could not be permitted. Even when merely riding along in the buggy

in the choking dust of the wagon train, as now, Louise knew that she must not intrude on Mrs. Massingale's thoughts, for they undoubtedly were deep. Presently Mrs. Massingale broke her long silence.

"Louise, what do you know about the Working Man's Struggle?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid."

"You're aware, aren't you, that Kevin O'Flaherty leads a group of teamsters that has made demands on Mr. Wallingham with which he has obstinately refused to comply?"

"Oh yes, I know about that," Louise said eagerly, pleased that she did know something about the Working Man's Struggle after all. "Last night after supper and again this morning Mr. O'Flaherty cornered me and came nigh onto talking an arm off me about his petition."

"So I noticed. Did you tell him that you sympathize with his group's aims?"

"No. I just listened politely and let him talk."

"You didn't antagonize him in any way?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Massingale! I was a bit distant and cool, of course, as a lady must always be to strange men if she really is a lady. But I was polite."

"Good!" Mrs. Massingale said with an approving smile. "Now answer a more difficult question. What would you do if I asked you not to be cool, distant, and polite to Kevin O'Flaherty but friendly, confiding, and warm?"

"Do you mean actually *flirt* with him?" Louise said in horror.

"Something like that, yes." Mrs. Massingale patted her arm encouragingly. "Don't look so shocked, my dear. When I wanted a look at a map, you handled Sergeant Buell quite capably, didn't you? And no harm came of it."

"That was different. Sergeant Buell is a soldier and *has* to behave himself. But Mr. O'Flaherty seems so bold and independent. What if I started something I couldn't stop? And what if Paul found out?"

"That is a consideration," Mrs. Massingale admitted. She was silent a moment. "Tell me about Paul—is he the jealous type?"

"I would say so, yes."

"Does he do violent things when he sees you paid attentions

by other men—such as assaulting them or challenging them to duels?”

“Oh no, nothing like that! He never loses control of himself. He just suffers.”

“How do you know he does?”

“He turns pale. It just wrings your heart to watch him. He chooses his words so carefully and becomes so precise in everything he does. But there isn’t a drop of blood left in his face. You just know he’s dying inside.”

Mrs. Massingale laughed. “Well, in that case, we needn’t worry about him. A little suffering is good for a man in love. It purifies his soul. Now listen to me, Louise. If we are to succeed in the thing we came here to do, we shall need all the friends we can make. We shall particularly need friends in the camp of the enemy—Mr. Wallingham’s camp. Did you ever split firewood?”

“No, ma’am.”

“I have, many a time. And I learned long ago that few women, including myself, have the strength to split wood with an ax. But I found that if I took a sharp iron wedge, searched the surface of the chunk to be split until I found a crack or flaw in which the wedge could be inserted, then pounded upon the wedge with what strength I did possess—eventually the piece of wood gave way. Do you understand me?”

“I’m beginning to, yes. The labor dispute between Kevin O’Flaherty and Mr. Wallingham is the flaw. I’m the wedge—”

“Your sympathy is the wedge, dear. Smile, listen, nod—and remember as you do so that you’re driving the wedge deeper and deeper. Let him understand first that you feel he is doing a tremendously courageous thing in fighting for the rights of his friends. Tell him you think the demands they are making are just. Tell him *all* we ladies are for him and his friends.”

“Well, if you’re sure he won’t get out of hand—personally speaking, that is—I’ll give it a try. When do you want me to begin?”

Ahead, the long column had come to a halt, for by now it was mid-morning and time for a brief rest. “The sooner the better. Isn’t that his wagon there?”

As she got down out of the buggy, Louise hesitated a moment, desperately wanting to ask the question burning in her mind:

Isn't this a terribly dishonest thing to do, Mrs. Massingale? Then she thought of Paul and her father and of the relationship existing between them. Would Paul ask such a question of *his* commander? Of course he would not! For he would know before the question ever was voiced that his commander could only reply: *Certainly it's dishonest! But this is war!*

Resolutely Louise marched toward Kevin O'Flaherty's wagon, planning her campaign step by step. First, the friendly smile. Second, the appeal for the loan of a little water for tea. Third. . . .

At approximately one o'clock in the afternoon, a horse came cantering forward from the rear of the long column, overtook Colonel Gearhart, and was reined in to walk alongside his own. Casually returning the precise salute of the young officer astride the horse, the colonel said, "Yes?"

"Sir, I have good reason to believe that a rapport is in the process of being established between the Temperance Marchers and the Irish teamsters."

"A which?"

"An understanding, an agreement, a secret liaison, sir. In a word, it is my considered opinion and firm conviction that the two groups are planning to pool their forces in concerted action."

"My God, Paul, you're a walking dictionary today!" Colonel Gearhart grunted, scowling at his aide. His scowl deepened. "Do you feel all right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Better slow down a bit. You're pale as a ghost."

"Your orders, sir, were that you wished my intelligence reports to you kept up to the minute."

"All right, all right!" Colonel Gearhart snapped. "You don't have to remind me what my orders were." He rode for a time in silence, gazing at the windings of the river ahead. "So you think the ladies and those hotheaded Irish teamsters are cooking up something, eh? Any idea what it could be?"

"Not yet, sir."

"How did you get this information?"

· "By close observation and a bit of eavesdropping, sir, upon

the leader of the Irish teamsters, Kevin O'Flaherty, and your daughter."

"What!"

"Yes, sir. They appear to have become quite fond of one another's company."

"I see." Again the colonel fell silent. After a time, he sighed. "Very well, Captain. Carry on."

As Captain Slater saluted and rode back toward the rear of the column, Colonel Gearhart's thoughts were bleak. *He did not say "my fiancée"; he said "your daughter." Wouldn't it be just dandy to have a redheaded Irish teamster in the family?*

After the column made camp in late afternoon, Cora Massingale came to Colonel Gearhart and politely requested permission to hold what she called a General Rally. When he asked her to state the nature of the mass meeting and tell him which groups she intended to invite to it, her answer struck him as being uncharacteristically vague.

"Oh, everybody will be invited—the teamsters, the Militia, the soldiers, the Indians—everybody."

"And what do you hope to accomplish?"

"Primarily the meeting will serve to make us all better acquainted, Colonel Gearhart. A bit of entertainment will be provided by each group—for instance, Mr. O'Flaherty has offered to sing some native Irish ballads and Chief Five Barrels has volunteered to bring along some expert Indian dancers. If you would be kind enough to lend us the band, it could play some numbers and we ladies could lead the hymn-singing."

"You would make a speech, of course."

"Only a very brief one, Colonel," Mrs. Massingale answered with a disarming smile, "whose object would be to stir up feelings of brotherly love rather than action of a militant nature."

Not long ago in the City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia, Colonel Gearhart had read in an Eastern newspaper, the gentle Quaker leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement had said almost these same exact words prior to holding a rally that had ended in one of the wildest riots the city had ever known. True, a handful of drunken rowdies had incited the fracas by heaving bricks through the windows of the hall. There were neither win-

dows to be broken nor bricks to be heaved here. But there were a few potential rowdies, a goodly supply of whiskey near at hand, and every man had access to a repeating rifle.

"I had hoped, Mrs. Massingale, to keep fraternization to a minimum. It can only lead to trouble."

"Fiddlesticks, Colonel! Why, everybody has been paying visits back and forth all day and there hasn't been so much as a cross word spoken. All we ask is a chance to understand one another."

"Very well," Colonel Gearhart said with a sigh. "Hold your rally, Mrs. Massingale. But it must be subject to certain restrictions as to location, duration, and the presence of firearms. And I must warn you that at the first sign of trouble I shall not hesitate to take strong measures."

"Which is only your duty, of course. Thank you so much, Colonel Gearhart. We will hold the rally right after supper."

A detailed account of the General Rally held that evening would be a waste of space in this already lengthy report, for nothing of importance occurred. However, certain highly important and irrevocable decisions must have been made as direct results of that outwardly friendly meeting, for even a cold factual list of the occurrences of the next twenty-four hours makes it crystal clear that human cunning rather than natural happenstance instigated them.

Events are preceded by decisions; any qualified historian will endorse that statement. But he will quickly add that the shape of the event following as a natural sequel to the decision all too frequently does not resemble the image pictured in the original decision-maker's mind. This point must be put across to the reader if he is to make any sense of the confusion soon to be narrated. Each decision-maker *thought* he was thinking quite clearly and *thought* he knew exactly what the consequences of his decision would be. In all cases, as events transpired, he was wrong. But even at the risk of offending the reader by belaboring an obvious point, this much must be stated: Confusion was not an aim; it was merely a result.

Let us now briefly list the decisions made following the General Rally:

CHIEF FIVE BARRELS

Convinced by what he has seen at the meeting that the White Man did indeed value his Women above all other possessions, cordially invites the Temperance Marchers to hold a Rally in *his* camp tomorrow night. He intimates that a large number of his followers are prepared to take the Pledge, after which they will peacefully go home.

MRS. CORA MASSINGALE

Not at all fooled by the Sioux chief's shallow pretension of virtue, she nevertheless agrees to send a delegation of women to the Indian camp. This will be an excellent diversionary maneuver, she feels, to turn attention away from the main objective to be attacked.

LOUISE GEARHART

Points out to Kevin O'Flaherty that if it is true, as he has claimed, that the ultimate weapon of the Working Man against Entrenched Capitalism is the Immobilization of Property, he and the Irish teamsters should prepare to act. Two hundred and fifty women of high purpose and firm resolve will back his group to the ultimate limit.

KEVIN O'FLAHERTY

Replies that much as he deplors the use of ultimate weapons, the point of no return has been passed. He will call a secret meeting of the Irish teamsters and recommend an affirmative vote to a strike.

COLONEL GEARHART

Lacking definite information as to what *anybody* intends to do, decides on the only course open to him—wait and watch.

FRANK WALLINGHAM

Feels that the crisis must come within the next forty-eight hours, though from which of a number of directions disaster's lightning may strike he cannot guess. Even the weather is his enemy now. Pins all his hopes on Oracle Jones, who seems to

be the only person in this whole crowd that is serenely optimistic everything will turn out for the best.

CITIZENS' MILITIA

Are sure Oracle Jones will take wagon train through despite all adversities. Is he not his old amiable, vision-seeing self again?

ORACLE JONES

Has a shrewdly accurate estimate of what all the other groups are planning to do but is not in the least concerned. For none of them know what *he* is planning to do. By the time they find out, there will be nothing left for them to fight over. He decides not to reveal his scheme to Frank Wallingham until just before making camp at the end of the next day's march. . . .

"My notion is we'd ought to make camp at Oxbow Bend," Oracle Jones told Frank Wallingham along toward the middle of the afternoon, next day. "You agreeable to that?"

Wallingham apprehensively studied the western skyline for a time before answering. Heavy gray clouds hung low over the mountain peaks, obscuring their higher crests, and there was a bluish tinge to the atmosphere that he did not like at all. He shook his head. "I don't pretend to be the prophet you are, Oracle, but it sure looks to me like a snowstorm is heading our way."

"Likely. She'll hit us early tomorrow mornin', I figger."

"If that's the case, wouldn't we be wise to make as many miles as we can this afternoon? If we keep moving until just before dark, we can get well beyond Oxbow Bend."

"You're boss," Oracle answered laconically. "But my recommend is we call it a day at the Bend."

"Any particular reason?"

"Yeah. I seen a Vision."

That settled the matter, of course, for though Frank Wallingham was not a particularly superstitious man he had no intention of quitting a winner at this stage of the game. "All right. We'll be there inside of an hour. I'll send word forward to Colonel Gearhart."

"Oh, jest one thing 'fore you do," Oracle said, reining his horse closer to Wallingham's, peering carefully around, then lowering his voice confidentially. "No matter how the colonel tries to lay out the camp, you pull your wagons a good two miles inside the neck of the Bend. Understand?"

"Two miles?" Wallingham protested. "Good Lord, Oracle, that'll take us right to the edge of Quicksand Bottoms!"

"Don't you think I know that? You do it, jest the same."

"What's the point to it? Two miles in today means two miles out tomorrow before we get back to the trail. That's a stupid waste of time and mule power!"

Oracle Jones shrugged indifferently. "Wal, do as you please, then. I'm gettin' sick of this whole mess, anyways. Come mornin', I'll light out fer Denver on my lonsome."

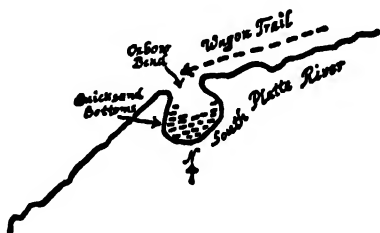
"Now wait a minute, Oracle!" Wallingham pleaded. "You know *something*, don't you? Something specific?"

"Shore. I know the sun's gonna set tonight and rise tomorrow—if the world don't come to an end. I know two miles in and two miles out makes four miles an' is a stupid waste of time and mule power, like you say. That's how I entertain myself—thinkin' up stupid wastes of time fer mules an' mule-headed people like you."

"All right, I'll do whatever you think best. But won't you tell me what you're up to?"

"When the time comes, yeah. Fer now, jest trust me."

Oxbow Bend, if drawn on a map, would look something like this:



A cursory glance by the reader at the above crude diagram should at once enlighten him regarding Frank Wallingham's objections to driving his wagons two miles into a river-bound *cul-de-sac* one day, then out again to the trail the next. But a more detailed description of the curious feature called "Quicksand Bottoms" may be helpful in aiding the reader to grasp the course of events soon to be revealed. .

Like other rivers of the Western High Plains country, the South Platte carried a varying amount of water according to the

season of the year. Its sandy, meandering bed was in many places a mile or more wide, although the actual channel or channels (there were sometimes more than one) containing the water itself might not be more than a few hundred feet in breadth during the drier periods.

Normally these periods of scant runoff were late summer and early fall; however, even then a sudden cloudburst in the mountains to the west could quickly turn the wide, dry expanse of apparently stable, packed sand into a treacherous water-covered morass that could be crossed by animals and vehicles only at their great peril. Mules, it should be noted here, are notoriously inept draft animals in wet sand because of the relative smallness of their hoofs as compared to those of horses or oxen.

The oddity about Quicksand Bottoms was that, no matter how dry the season or how little water flowed in the channels of the near-by river, Quicksand Bottoms never dried out. One low, grass-covered, sandy expanse of ground might be solid enough to build a house upon; while but a single step away that same house, if dropped from some machine capable of carrying it through the air, would in moments disappear from sight as if plunked into a bowl of gravy. As might be expected, numerous wild and fanciful tales were told by travelers about the place; but on one fact everyone agreed—Quicksand Bottoms was an interesting place to visit, but only a fool would attempt to cross it.

Let us now return to our tale. . . .

Colonel Gearhart received his first intimation of impending trouble at 3:30 P.M. when Captain Slater rode up to the head of the column, saluted crisply, and said, "Sir, Mr. Wallingham insists on making camp at Oxbow Bend."

The colonel frowned, for already the head of the column had reached a point a half mile beyond the Bend. "Convey him my respects, Captain Slater, and inform him that in view of the fact there are still two hours of daylight left it is my opinion we should press on at least as far as Two Island Crossing."

"Begging your pardon, sir, but his wagons are pulling out of the column now. If you'll look back, you can ascertain that fact for yourself, sir."

Such indeed was the case, Colonel Gearhart saw as he brought Company "D" to a halt and reined his horse about. Irritably he said, "What the devil is wrong with him that he should waste good daylight by stopping now?"

"He ascribed no motive to his decision, sir, but if you want my opinion he's alarmed about something. My belief is he chose to camp at Oxbow Bend because of its strategically defensive advantages."

"Who does he think he's got to defend himself against?"

"I don't know, sir. But note, if you will, that instead of halting his wagons in the neck of the Bend he is moving them on south toward Quicksand Bottoms."

"The damn fool! Doesn't he know how treacherous the Bottoms are?"

"I'm sure he does, sir. After all, he is acting under the advice of Oracle Jones. No one knows this country as well as *he* does."

"You're right about that," Colonel Gearhart said, nodding. "Well, if Wallingham insists on calling it a day there's nothing we can do but make camp. Set it up in the usual way."

Much as the colonel's military mind deplored confusion, he had come by now to accept the fact that in a traveling column made up of as many mixed elements as this one was a certain amount of disorder was inevitable in the distribution of vehicles, animals, and people at the end of a day's march. But today the confusion associated with the making of camp mounted to a pitch that could only be described as pure bedlam. Amid the vision-obscuring veil of dust churned up by hoofs and wheels, he could hear teamsters shouting, women calling out to one another, officers and non-coms giving orders, and Indians noisily dashing here and there, yipping and whooping for no other apparent reason than the enjoyment of the sound of their own voices. Suddenly Captain Slater galloped up and reined his mount to a halt in a cloud of dust.

"Sir, there's been a serious disturbancel!"

"Where? What? Who?"

"The Irish teamsters have refused to follow the rest of the wagons to the main camp, sir. They have made their own circle and have gone on strike."

"What's Wallingham doing about it?"

"He's rallied the Citizens' Militia behind him, sir, and is threatening to take the wagons by force."

"Oh hell! You put a stop to *that* nonsense, I trust?"

"The forces available to me were limited, sir. The best I could do was interpose a platoon between the Citizens' Militia and the Ladies——"

"The Ladies!" Colonel Gearhart exclaimed. "Don't tell me they're involved in this, too!"

"Very much so, sir. Fifty of them have lent their support to Mr. O'Flaherty's group. They have formed a complete circle around the wagons of the Irish teamsters, have joined hands, and sat down. Now they are daring Mr. Wallingham and the Citizens' Militia to make them move."

Even in a situation where an immediate decision is required to forestall catastrophe, the intelligent commander always makes sure that he fully understands what his forces are up against before he commits them beyond recall, Colonel Gearhart knew. Furthermore, he must always give great weight to the judgment of the subordinate officer most conversant with the problem.

"Would you say, Captain Slater, that violence is imminent?"

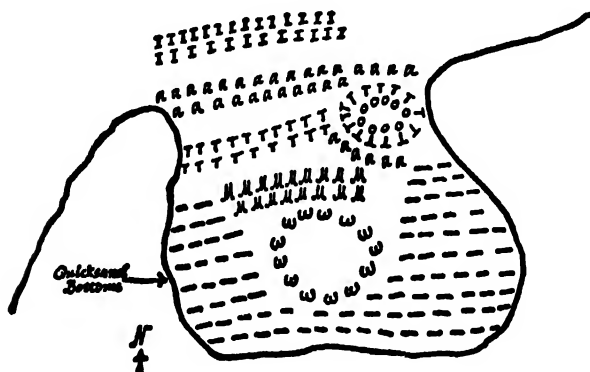
"I would say, sir, that at this moment the situation is static," the captain replied carefully. "However, I would suggest that you immediately review it for yourself and take whatever measures you think best to ameliorate it."

In other words, the colonel thought bleakly, to put the matter accurately if inelegantly: *It's your baby; you change it*. He sighed. "Very well, Captain. Let's go have a look."

Even concerned as he was over the potential explosiveness of the situation, Colonel Gearhart could not help but mentally applaud the swiftness with which Cora Massingale had exploited her adversary's strategic mistake and the cunning with which she had deployed her forces. Divide and conquer was an old military principle, of course, and from what Captain Slater had told him earlier the colonel was positive that Mrs. Massingale not only had encouraged the Irish teamsters to strike but had chosen the time, place, and means by which their strike could have its maximum effect. Furthermore, she had instantly seen that in taking his wagons so far within the encircling arc of

Oxbow Bend, Frank Wallingham had unwittingly moved them into a trap whose only door could be sprung shut by the simple expedient of parking the buggies and other vehicles under her command across the narrow mouth of the Bend.

Graphically illustrated, the situation now looked like this:



Code: "I"—Indians
 "A"—Army
 "O"—O'Flaherty's Teamsters
 "T"—Temperance Marchers
 "M"—Citizens' Militia
 "W"—Wallingham Train

Except for Frank Wallingham himself, who was arguing so vehemently with one of the leaders of the Citizens' Militia that he did not notice the approach of Colonel Gearhart, an ominous silence lay over the groups confronting one another. At least the colonel first judged it to be ominous, for he had fully expected to find all the parties involved squabbling at the top of their voices and teetering on the brink of violence. But a shrewd appraisal of the averted eyes, the nervous shuffling of feet, and the uncertainty of the exchanged glances suddenly made him aware that among the men present the mood was chiefly embarrassment.

To Captain Slater, he murmured, "What orders have you issued your troopers?"

"To stand firm, sir; to prevent the use of force; to fire only if fired upon."

"Good! Any idea what Wallingham is trying to do?"

"He's been demanding that the Militia move forward, sir, push the soldiers aside, pick up the women, carry them out of the way, and then club the Irishmen down with their rifle butts."

"It appears he's getting little co-operation."

"Not so far, sir. Crude as these men appear to be, they are most reluctant to lay hands on a woman. And the Ladies have been cultivating their good will, sir, in all possible ways."

The Ladies, truth to tell, seemed not in the least perturbed by the crisis they had instigated. Their feet demurely folded and their skirts neatly circled around them, they sat smilingly holding hands with their neighbor on each side, forming a complete ring around the fifteen parked wagons. Beyond them, peering out uneasily but defiantly, could be seen fifteen sunburned, dogged Irish faces.

"You cowards!" Frank Wallingham shouted, turning away from the leaders of the Citizens' Militia in disgust and shaking a fist angrily at the forted-up teamsters. "What kind of men are you to hide behind the skirts of women?"

"Faith, and we're only poor, honest workin' men," Kevin O'Flaherty called back, "fightin' for our just rights. 'Tis our good fortune that the Ladies, bless their kind hearts, sympathize with us."

"You're thieves, that's what you are! So are they! You're in league together to put a gun to my head and steal my hard-earned profits out of my pocket by fair means or foul! Bless the kind hearts of the Ladies, you say! Ladies? That's not what I call them! I call them a pack of de-sexed female busybodies lacking in all qualities of fundamental decency——"

Colonel Gearhart spurred his horse forward and snapped, "Mr. Wallingham!"

"Well, you finally got here, did you?" the owner of the freight-firm said sarcastically, whirling around. "You're the man responsible for this mess! I demand that you straighten it out!"

"You are laboring under a great misapprehension, sir, in accusing me of being in any way responsible for your present difficulties," Colonel Gearhart answered coldly. "However, I'll

be happy to do what I can to expedite the ironing out of your quarrel."

"Quarrell!" Wallingham roared. "I'm not having a quarrel with anybody! Those damned Irishmen just up and stole fifteen wagon loads of whiskey from me—that's what the fuss is about!"

"'Stole,' Mr. Wallingham? The wagons are right there. I can see them with my own eyes."

"Well, they're the same as stole, aren't they, if their drivers won't drive them where I tell them to?"

"Not at all. The drivers simply are exercising their right to refuse to work."

"Then I'll exercise *my* right to fire the bastards!"

"Mr. Wallingham, *please!* There are ladies present."

"You're telling *me* there are ladies present!" Wallingham exclaimed, turning apoplectic. "I *know* they're present! And I want them removed, by God, right now!"

"They, too, are exercising their rights," Colonel Gearhart said patiently. "The right of Peaceable Assembly, the Constitution calls it, I believe."

"What about *my* rights? Ain't I got the right to move my own wagons?"

"Certainly—so long as you do no violence to other individuals peacefully exercising *their* rights."

Frank Wallingham gave a snort of disgust. Turning to the Citizens' Militia, whose members had been watching and listening intently, he said gruffly, "Boys, if you're as sick and tired of this tin soldier's lawyer talk as I am you'll do what I told you. Just push those troopers aside, pick up the women, and tote them away——"

"Captain Slater, take personal charge of your platoon," Colonel Gearhart ordered. "You will meet force with force, to whatever extent necessary."

"Yes, sir."

"Come on, men!" Wallingham shouted. "What are you waiting for?"

The members of the Denver Citizens' Militia looked uneasily at one another, shook their heads, and stayed where they were. Clayton Howell, one of the leaders, said, "Aw, Frank, be reasonable. You can't expect us to fight the United States Army."

"Yeah, cool off, Frank," another man said. "Them wagons ain't goin' nowhere. Leave 'em be fer a spell while we talk this thing out."

"Sure, Frank," a third man volunteered helpfully. "Talkin' over a labor dispute is always better than shootin' people or bustin' heads. Reasonable men can work out a sensible compromise."

Colonel Gearhart nodded approvingly. "Excellent advice, Mr. Wallingham. My suggestion is you take it."

Apparently aware of the fact that he had no choice, Frank Wallingham angrily turned on his heel and walked away. As the Citizens' Militia began to disperse and return to their camp, Colonel Gearhart intently searched the group with his eyes for Oracle Jones, failed to find him, frowned in puzzlement, then spurred his mount over to Captain Slater's side.

"What happened to Oracle?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Something is fishy here. In my judgment, he's far too cunning to lead those wagons into a trap they can't get out of."

"Perhaps he underestimated the Ladies, sir," Captain Slater said politely. "Such a thing has happened before."

"That remark has very derogatory personal implications, Captain Slater. In fact, I would call it downright disrespectful."

"No offense to you was meant, sir," the captain replied stiffly. "It was the quality of my own past judgments I was questioning."

Seeing Cora Massingale walking toward him, Colonel Gearhart swung off his horse, touched his hat brim courteously, and said, "My congratulations, Mrs. Massingale. Your maneuver was brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed."

"Oh, do you really think so, Colonel?" Mrs. Massingale said, giving him a warm, happy smile. "I'm greatly flattered."

"What do you expect to gain by it?"

"Time, for one thing."

"Time is a two-edged sword, Mrs. Massingale. Your Ladies can't immobilize those wagons forever, you know."

"We'll see."

"May I ask what your next move will be?"

"To be perfectly frank, Colonel Gearhart, I have made no

long-range plans. We will of course continue to maintain our non-violent line of pickets around the wagons of the striking teamsters. We will also maintain our non-violent blockade of the exit to Oxbow Bend." She paused. "Oh yes, there is one more thing I should mention—after supper tonight, some fifty members of our group are going to the Indian camp to hold a Rally."

"That is your privilege, of course," Colonel Gearhart said. "But in my opinion, it is a most unwise thing to do."

"Why?"

"These are not tame Indians, Mrs. Massingale, despite their professions of peace. They claim to be a hunting party, and indeed they are; but they are not hunting for meat—they are hunting for whiskey."

"Which you will prevent them from getting, I trust."

"That is my duty, yes. May I express the hope that you and your Ladies will not force me to neglect it because of my concern for your safety?"

Mrs. Massingale laughed good-humoredly. "If you're trying to tell me, Colonel, that protecting 250 ladies is putting an undue strain on you and your men, permit me to relieve you of it. We ladies are perfectly capable of looking out for ourselves."

"Perhaps. But I strongly advise you not to send a delegation to the Indian camp tonight."

"We must. We promised Chief Five Barrels we would come."

"Very well," Colonel Gearhart said stiffly. "Since you persist in being obstinate, I will send Captain Slater and his company along to make sure no harm comes to you."

Mrs. Massingale's eyes flashed angrily and she stamped her foot in sudden exasperation "Colonel Gearhart, how can you be so stupid? One does not make friends at gunpoint. Send a squad of soldiers along as an escort, if you like, but please don't insult the hospitality of those poor Indians by invading their camp with a whole company."

Even as the word escaped from his lips, Colonel Gearhart recalled that nothing had infuriated his late wife so much as being called "obstinate," even when she was; invariably, she had retaliated in a childish manner by calling him "stupid," which of course he was not. But with tempers roused and better judg-

ments clouded on both sides, rash things had often been said and done that later were cause for regret.

"All right, Mrs. Massingale!" he exploded. "A squad it shall be! As a matter of fact, the fewer men I'm required to send to escort your Ladies the more I'll have left to keep order here."

"Apparently you anticipate trouble. Who do you fear will start it?"

"Spare me your dewy-eyed air of innocence, please," Colonel Gearhart said coldly. "You know as well as I do where the open powder kegs lie. One carelessly dropped spark—and boom!"

"You're talking in riddles, Colonel," Mrs. Massingale said with a frown. "Be specific, I pray you."

"Very well. The fifteen wagons driven by O'Flaherty's men are no longer under Frank Wallingham's control, right? Which means that his guards can no longer watch over the wagons' contents, correct?"

"Yes, but what difference does that make? Neither the wagons nor their contents are being molested."

"And they had better *not* be molested, Mrs. Massingale. I have no intention of interfering in a labor dispute. But if O'Flaherty and his teamsters start helping themselves to the whiskey in those wagons, I shall be forced to take strong measures. Immobilizing property is one thing. Destroying or consuming it is quite another. Before I'll tolerate fifteen drunken Irishmen in this camp, there will be some noses bloodied and some heads dented, I assure you."

"Why, Colonel Gearhart," Mrs. Massingale said with a laugh, patting him chidingly on the forearm as a fond mother might pat an errant but basically lovable child, "don't you give me credit for having *any* sense? Kevin O'Flaherty and his men will not touch that whiskey, I guarantee you."

"How can you?"

"In agreeing to support them in their strike, my first condition was that they all sign the Temperance Pledge."

"You made fifteen Irishmen do *that*?"

"I certainly did, Colonel Gearhart." Her eyes twinkled challengingly. "Would you like to make a small wager that my Ladies will not bring back zoo signed Temperance Pledges from the Indian camp tonight?"

In works of fiction it is the deplorable practice of far too many authors to create artificial suspense by the use of such phrases as: "Little did he know then what the dire consequences of his innocent remark would be. . . ."; or "Had she but realized. . . ."; or even "Great tragedy was to ensue as a direct result of that sneering laugh, blighting three tender young lives. . . ."

Such trite devices of course have no place in a straightforward factual report such as this one. True, the narrator of this document has from time to time set down bits of conversation not actually overheard or recorded, has ascribed thoughts and motives to the people involved not completely verifiable, and has drawn conclusions impossible to substantiate objectively. However, in all cases where such literary aids to intelligent, perceptive narration have been employed, the aim of the writer has been Understanding. For History is not merely a cold compilation of dates, facts, and events (Herodotus, Gibbon, and Thomas Jefferson all vouch for this); the best historians interpret as well as record.

In a word, the aim of good factual writing is Meaning.

So, without departing from our original formula of chronological narration of events as they occurred, let us now visit the leaders of the various groups and see exactly what they meant to do. Later, we will compare their intentions with what they actually *did* do. . . .

"Louise," Mrs. Massingale said earnestly, "in my opinion this is the golden opportunity we have been waiting for. But are you quite sure you and your delegation will be in no danger?"

"There will be no risk at all," Louise answered. "The Indians respect father. They know that Paul's Company 'A' is the fin-

est cavalry troop in the West. If Chief Five Barrels or any of his men so much as look cross-eyed at us, one little scream from me will bring instant retribution down on their heads. They won't forget that, believe me."

"Well, even so, your father himself is worried. He's sending along a squad of soldiers as an escort."

"Pooh! We won't need them. In fact, I still wish you'd let me stay here and help you. Because it's you and your group who will be facing the *real* danger."

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Massingale said lightly, but Louise was quick to note that her face looked strained and drawn. "What's dangerous about punching a hole in a barrel of whiskey?"

"But there are *eighty* wagons, Mrs. Massingale! No matter how quietly you slip into them and go to work, *some* of you are bound to get caught. Then what will you do?"

"We will all be armed, my dear. In the dark, an eight-inch hatpin can be a dangerous weapon in the hands of any woman. Besides, if things go as planned each lady will climb into her assigned wagon while the rest of us are creating a diversion elsewhere. Once inside, she will lie still as a mouse until the teamsters have gone to sleep." She gave Louise a sharply questioning look. "Did Kevin O'Flaherty instruct you regarding the quickest, easiest way to open a barrel?"

"He wasn't very helpful, to tell the truth. In fact, he was shocked."

"Shocked that we should destroy Mr. Wallingham's property," Mrs. Massingale said dryly, "or shocked at such a waste of alcohol?"

"Both, I suppose. But he really *was* terrified. In Ireland they hang men for doing things much less serious than what we're going to do, he said. He's deathly afraid he and his group will be blamed."

"You told him, of course, that I personally intend to assume all the blame?"

"Yes, ma'am. He wondered if you would put that in writing."

"Of course I will!" Mrs. Massingale exclaimed indignantly. "In fact, I have already written, signed, and sealed into an envelope addressed to your father a full statement admitting that my grounds for destroying Mr. Wallingham's poison are moral

rather than legal, that I alone bear full responsibility, and that Mr. Wallingham may sue me for damages to his heart's content. All of which is beside the point now. Did Kevin O'Flaherty give you any hint at all as to how to open the barrels?"

"He did say they had a bung or something like that. You knock it in—or out—I didn't understand him very well."

"That sounds noisy. Would a hatpin do the trick?"

"He didn't think so. Even if you could puncture a barrel with a hatpin, he said, the hole it made would be so small it would take forever for the whiskey to leak out. And some of the wagons are loaded with French champagne, which is in bottles. You certainly couldn't punch a hole in a bottle, he said."

"Oh, men are so helpless and lacking in ingenuity!" Mrs. Massingale said in exasperation. "I never saw a bottle of French champagne in my life and I'll bet very few of the ladies have either, but if we can't find *some* way to open those bottles and pour out that poison, we don't deserve to be called women."

"I've seen bottles of French champagne," Louise offered helpfully. "They have a cork stopper that's fastened down with a wire thingamajig you untwist——"

"Never mind, dear. We'll figure it out. Now—when you and your delegation go to the Indian camp. . . ."

"Paul," Colonel Gearhart said to his aide, "I really hate to impose these unpleasant duties upon you, but Mrs. Massingale informs me that a delegation of her Ladies is holding a rally in the Indian camp tonight. You will take a squad of men and go along as an escort."

"Yes, sir. Whatever you say, sir."

"Damn it, Paul, unbutton your collar and be human, *will* you? This mess is none of my doing and I'd appreciate it if you'd quit acting like I personally invented Temperance Marchers."

"I'm sorry, sir, if my preoccupation with my own problems makes it appear that I have no sympathy for yours. Because I do, sir, truly I do."

Colonel Gearhart gave his son-in-law-to-be-he-hoped a weary smile, clapped him affectionately on the back, and said, "Cheer up, boy. By this time tomorrow, I predict, our troubles will be over."

"Really, sir?" Captain Slater said, looking surprised. "On what do you base such a prediction?"

"My corns. They hurt."

"Oh? But usually all that means is a change in the weather—or so you've told me."

"Exactly! Some time early tomorrow, I'm wagering, it's going to begin to snow. When it does, a lot of people will think differently about strikes, non-violent picket lines, and raids on whiskey trains."

"That's good reasoning, sir. Certainly Mr. Wallingham will be so worried about his wagons getting snowed in he'll be inclined to meet the Irish teamsters halfway."

"Right! In my opinion, the minute it starts to snow the leaders of all groups will seriously reappraise their earlier aims. Which is when I'll make my move."

"You have a Plan, sir?"

"I do. Actually, what it amounts to is a series of compromises that will save face for all parties involved. Here's how it will work. . . ."

"Behold," Chief Five Barrels said to Walks-Stooped-Over, Elk Runner, and the other Indian leaders and medicine men gathered in council around him, "the big sticks which I place so on the ground are wagons loaded with firewater. The little sticks are White Squaws. Do you understand?"

Heads nodded, hands moved in gestures of assent, and guttural grunts signified that all present did indeed understand.

"The firewater wagons will not come to us of their own accord," the chief continued, "because the man who owns them will not permit them to. We cannot go to them and drive them away because the bluecoats are camped here. See, I draw a line to show where the bluecoats are camped."

Again, heads, hands, and grunts indicated that the illustrated lecture was being intently followed.

"In a little while," the chief went on, "some of the White Squaws will come to hold a Council with us. How many will come, I cannot say. But I would guess this many." Picking up a handful of little sticks, he replaced them on the ground some distance away from the line indicating bluecoats. "We will treat

them well. We will listen to everything they say. We will tell them their talk is good. When they put papers before us to sign, each one of us will make his mark and swear to do whatever the papers say we should do."

"What will the papers say?" Walks-Stooped-Over asked curiously.

"That we must be good Indians and not kill White People."

"Will the White Squaws bring us gifts?"

"No."

"Then why should we sign the papers? Why should we lower our dignity by listening to Squaw Talk? In our own Councils, squaws are not permitted to talk."

"Wait, Brother, until I explain the rest of my Plan. When the White Squaws start to leave, we will not let them go. We will treat them kindly and not harm them but we will keep them here. Then we will send a messenger to the camp of the blue-coats, carrying this many little sticks. He will say: 'Behold, we have this many White Squaws—which we will keep until you send us this many wagons loaded with firewater. . . .'"

"Gents," Oracle Jones said to Frank Wallingham, Rafe Pike, and Clayton Howell, second-in-command leader of the Denver Citizens' Militia, "I reckon the time has come to let you in on my scheme."

"It had better be a mighty good one," Frank Wallingham grunted. "The way those damned Females have got us bottled up, they can keep us here till Doomsday unless we work up the guts to drive our wagons through them. Colonel Gearhart won't stand for that, damn his stuff-shirted soul! You know what I think? I think Cora Massingale has sweet-talked the spine right out of him and wrapped him around her little finger! I think he's gone daffy over her! I think——"

"Wal, what you think is mighty interestin' an' entertainin'," Oracle Jones interrupted dryly, "but my notion was this here meetin' was called to hear what I think."

"Sorry, Oracle. What do you think?"

"Real simple thoughts, Frank." Squatting cross-legged on the ground while the others hunkered on their heels intently watching him, the old mountain man picked up a stick and began to

sketch in the dust. "This here is Oxbow Bend. We're here, the Females are there, the Army there, an' the Injuns there. Directly south of us an' flankin' us left an' right is that peculiar phenomenon of nature called Quicksand Bottoms."

"So?"

"Everybody knows there ain't no way to git acrost them Bottoms. The Injuns know it, the Army knows it, Rafe knows it, an' you know it. Ain't that right, Frank?"

"Sure. Nobody but a rank greenhorn or a blithering idiot would go into the Bottoms if he valued his life."

Oracle Jones cackled gleefully. "What would you say, Frank, if I told you I'd crossed Quicksand Bottoms lots of times?"

"If I didn't know you so well," Wallingham said with a scowl, "I'd call you a bald-faced liar. Have you actually crossed those Bottoms?"

"Yep."

"Afoot or on horseback?"

"Both ways. In fact, I just got back from ridin' clean down to the river, markin' out a trail fer the wagons to follow when we pull out tomorrow morning. The drivers can't miss it. What I done was tear up a pair of long-handled red-flannel underwear, tie strips to stakes, lay out a trail——"

"Wait a minute!" Wallingham exclaimed. "Are you trying to tell me you've found a safe way for the wagons to cross the Bottoms?"

"Yep," Oracle answered, nodding, "that's what I'm tryin' to do."

"I can't believe it!"

"It's true, jest the same. A long time ago—twenty, thirty years, I reckon it was—a mess of scalp-hungry Injuns run me to ground at the edge of the Bottoms. Night come on an' I knew they'd git me fer sure, come daylight, iff'n I didn't find some way to skin out of wherè I was dug in. I happened to be ridin' a wise old hoss which'd been born an' raised in these parts. That old hoss wa'n't skeered of but two things—Injuns an' quicksand. Way I figgered was I jest might as well go under one way as another, so come dark I got on that old hoss, pointed his head south, an' let him go, which he'd acted like he was anxious to do."

"And he took you through the Bottoms?"

"Why, no, he didn't," Oracle said dryly. "Right off, he stepped into a soft spot an' we both sunk out of sight, nevermore to be seen by the eye of mortal man."

"All right, you don't have to get sarcastic," Wallingham apologized. "I believe you."

"Later, I come back in broad daylight," Oracle went on, "an' had that old hoss do the same trick again. A body never kin tell when a chunk of knowledge like that will come in handy."

"It seems strange to me you've kept it to yourself all these years."

"Oh, I got lots of odd chunks of private knowledge stored up in my head," Oracle muttered with a sly grin. "You'd be surprised the things I know. Truly, you'd be surprised." Suddenly the smile faded and he became crisply businesslike. "Now—here's what we got to do. Come mornin', we'll hitch up the mules right after breakfast. Them Females will be concentratin' on blockin' the entrance to Oxbow Bend. If the weather does what I think it's goin' to do, snow'll be fallin' an' nobody'll be able to see very far. The Militia will stay between our wagons an' them Females blockin' the entrance to the Bend, kind of pressin' against 'em an' holdin' their attention. Our wagons will cross Quicksand Bottoms single file along the trail I've staked out, then ford the river—"

"Are you sure it can be forded safely?"

"Won't be no trick at all. Most of the water in the river, you see, seeps under and through Quicksand Bottoms 'stead of runnin' in the main channels."

"Sounds logical enough."

"Once we git the wagons acrost the river, we got a straight shoot southwest to Denver over flat, open country. We got the Militia behind us as a rear guard. As the last man comes through the Bottoms, he kin pull up the stakes so's the Females, the Army, an' the Injuns won't dare follow. Way I figger is it'll take 'em quite a spell to realize what's happened, another spell to mill around an' decide what to do, an' then—when they finally do decide—they'll have to circle way around an' go clean on down-river to Two Island Crossing 'fore they can take to our trail."

"Give us half a day's start," Wallingham said, nodding

grimly, "and I'll guarantee you those nosy Females won't catch us short of Denver."

"That's the idee, yeah. An' them soldiers won't dare leave the Ladies. Shore, the Injuns might be able to head us off by hard ridin', but we'll be mighty close to Denver by the time they do. An' even without any help, we got men an' guns enough to give 'em more of a fight than they'll have a belly for."

Rafe Pike and Clayton Howell were nodding their unqualified approval of the Plan. But a thought suddenly occurred to Frank Wallingham. "There's just one flaw, Oracle. What happens to the fifteen wagons those damned Irishmen have taken over?"

"You'll just have to leave 'em behind, I reckon."

"My God, Oracle, do you have any idea how much money I paid for the cargo in those fifteen wagons?"

"Wal, as the fella says," Oracle answered with a philosophical shrug, "half a loaf is better'n none. An' who says you'll lose 'em permanent by leavin' 'em behind? It's Colonel Gearhart's duty to protect property, ain't it?"

"That's true."

"He damn sure ain't goin' to let the Injuns ner the Irishmen have fifteen wagon loads of whiskey. He ain't goin' to give that whiskey to his soldiers ner them Females——"

"If the Ladies have their way, they'll pour it in the river. That's what worries me."

"Wouldn't you peel off the colonel's hide if he let 'em do that?"

"I'd try, you can bet."

"Wal, then, why git in a stew about a measly fifteen wagon loads of whiskey you may not lose at all when you're certain sure to save the other sixty-five?"

"You're right, Oracle," Frank Wallingham said, nodding. He sighed. "It's just that it suddenly occurred to me, those fifteen wagons aren't carrying whiskey—they're loaded with French champagne."

Loneliness was an essential part of the price one paid for being in a position of command, Colonel Gearhart knew. But never before in his entire military career—no, not even during the Civil War when it had been his bleak duty to make decisions committing entire battalions to bloody sacrifice—had he felt as lonely and completely forsaken by all human kind as he felt this night in camp at Oxbow Bend.

Darkness had fallen some time ago. For the past two hours he had sat in his tent writing reports by lantern light—dull, factual reports that would be dutifully scanned and dutifully filed away against the remote possibility that one, ten, or a hundred years from now some future War Department historian would be interested in how many miles had been traveled this day, how many meals had been eaten, how many troopers had been treated by the surgeon for griping of the bowels, what the temperature, the precipitation, the wind velocity and direction thereof, etc., had been in this part of the world on this particular day.

Wearily signing the last of the reports, Colonel Gearhart put down his pen, leaned back on his camp stool, and kneaded his cramped, cold-numbered fingers together. Why was it, he wondered, that lately the temptation had come to him time and again to write into his reports totally irrelevant and strictly subjective remarks? He had not succumbed to it, of course. But how surprised an historian would be a hundred years from now if he should find inserted in a dry, factual report such personal comments as:

By God, I'd like to go on a two-day binge; or It's a hell of a thing when a man doesn't dare say hello to his own daughter or take a meal with her for fear of compromising the neutrality of his position; or even If she ever let her hair down and took a

couple of snorts of liquor, Cora Templeton Massingale would forget a lot of her high-minded principles, I'll wager, and the right sort of man just might. . . .

Whoa, now! That kind of mental woolgathering could lead to nothing but trouble. Still, the colonel mused as he got to his feet and passed a hand over his aching eyes, a man was bound to wonder now and again what kind of world this sorry old globe would be if the plain and simple truth were recorded in plain and simple words once in a while.

Leaving the tent, he paused outside and stood listening to the sounds of camp. Near by, Lieutenants Jackson and Swain were engaged in a low-voiced, friendly argument as they warmed themselves over a small fire. Sentries paced their beats; horses dozed on their picket lines; the acrid odor of campfire smokes filled the valley; drums could be heard throbbing in the Indian camp; and, in the opposite direction, the voices of women could be heard raised in song. So far as one's senses of hearing, sight, and smell could be relied upon, the immediate world in Colonel Gearhart's nominal charge was completely at peace.

Ah, there was the rub! To a man in a position of authority, outward appearances of peace must always be mistrusted. He must keep constantly in mind such an intertwined skein of Possibilities, Probabilities, Could-Be's, and What-If's that his nerves stayed as taut as the strings of a harp. No wonder generals sprouted premature gray hairs, grew old before their time, and actually welcomed the only brief periods of Peace they ever knew—the Peace of Battle.

Whoa, again! What do you want to do, Colonel, resign from the human race? No, sir, not permanently. All I want to do is chat for a bit with my only child. Or go on a two-day binge. Or show Cora how to let her hair down. . . .

"Lieutenant Swain!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Any new developments?"

"None, sir, since I last reported to you half an hour ago. One group of Ladies went up to the Indian camp, escorted by a squad under Captain Slater's personal charge. Another marched down to the Wallingham wagons to hold a torchlight parade."

"No unpleasant incidents have been reported?"

"Not a single one, sir. Oh, there have been some complaints from Mr. Wallingham's teamsters that the mules were being made nervous by the singing of the Women, but I don't see that we can remedy that."

"What the Ladies are doing, sir," Lieutenant Jackson said, "is marching around the wagons, singing hymns. At last count, they had made the circuit six times."

"Like Jericho, eh?" Colonel Gearhart murmured absently.

"Beg pardon, sir?" Lieutenant Swain said.

"Don't you remember your Old Testament, Lieutenant?"

"Oh yes, you mean when the Israelites marched around the walled city of the Moabites, singing and blowing on trumpets, and on the seventh time around the walls fell down."

"That is the general reference I had in mind, yes, although I do believe you have your facts slightly confused."

"He certainly does, sir," Lieutenant Jackson said. "In the first place, they were Ishmaelites, not Moabites. In the second place, it wasn't seven times, it was eight."

"Would you like to bet on that?" Lieutenant Swain challenged.

"Sure. You name the stakes."

"A round of drinks in Denver."

"Done!"

"Colonel Gearhart, would you happen to have a Bible we could use to settle this?"

"Not with me, no," the colonel answered, smiling. "But my daughter always carries one. If you can find her——"

Out of the shadows beyond the circle of firelight a group of men appeared, was challenged by a sentry, was allowed to pass, drew near, and politely came to a halt. Noting that the men were the Irish teamsters, Colonel Gearhart frowned as Kevin O'Flaherty, apparently uncertain of protocol, awkwardly saluted and then fumblingly removed his hat.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but might we be havin' a word with you?"

"Certainly, Mr. O'Flaherty. What's on your mind?"

"We have had a meetin', sir," O'Flaherty said, taking a piece of paper out of his pocket, "and have unanimously agreed that under the strained circumstances now existin', some of which

we freely and openly admit our responsibility for but beyond which we deny any and all liability of, that therefore, sir, we wish to present you with, first by means of verbal statement and secondly endorsed by this legally wrote and signed document, our earnest and humble plea to be granted Asylum."

"I see," Colonel Gearhart said solemnly, his mind still entrapped in the syntactical flypaper of O'Flaherty's verbal meanderings. "Pray read your statement."

Kevin O'Flaherty did so. Still somewhat mystified, Colonel Gearhart said, "Let me get this straight. You're leaving Mr. Wallingham's employ—"

"Oh no, sir! Until he officially discharges us and gives us our pay, we regard ourselves as his faithful, loyal workmen."

"But you don't want to sleep near his wagons tonight?"

"That's right, sir. We humbly request Asylum in your camp, entrusting our persons and safety to you, askin' that you vouch for our whereabouts and innocence of all criminal actions or intent—"

"In other words, something's going to happen tonight," the colonel cut in bluntly, "and you don't want to be blamed for it. Is that what you're trying to say?"

"Sir, at our meetin' we agreed unanimously that the statement read to you and now presented in writin' would be the only statement we cared to make. The Constitution of the United States, sir, as I understand it, makes it clear that no man may be compelled to testify against himself nor to inform on people who have befriended him if such testification or information be against his conscience and free will."

"You've made your point, Mr. O'Flaherty," Colonel Gearhart said grimly. "Lieutenant Jackson, see that these men are bedded down. Lieutenant Swain, double the number of guards stationed around the O'Flaherty wagons. If you can manage it without doing violence to the picketing Ladies, inspect the contents of every wagon and make sure those barrels of whiskey have not been tampered with."

"Yes, sir."

As the two lieutenants saluted, there came a sudden crisp tattoo of hoofs, a hard-ridden horse materialized out of the darkness, skidded to a halt, and Captain Paul Slater—his face chalk-

white in the firelight—swung to the ground. "Sir, I beg leave to report a crisis!"

"What's happened?"

"The Indians, sir, have disarmed my men and taken the Ladies captives."

"What!"

"Yes, sir. They acted so swiftly and we were so badly outnumbered, sir, there was nothing we could do."

"Oh Lord!" Colonel Gearhart groaned. Whirling around, he snapped to Lieutenants Jackson and Swain. "Alert the buglers! Rouse the camp! Mount the troops! Prepare for battle!"

"Yes, sir!"

"On the double, damn it! Move!"

"One moment, Colonel!" Captain Slater cried, his voice so agonized that the two lieutenants stopped in their tracks. "Any rash move on our part may seriously endanger the lives of the Women."

"Well, I'm not going to just stand here twiddling my thumbs!"

"No, sir. But an attack would be most ill-advised."

Give Paul Slater his due, Colonel Gearhart thought bleakly, even emotionally upset as he was, he had not lost his head. The colonel nodded curtly. "You're right, Captain. Skip the bugle calls. Alert the troops, have them saddle up, arm themselves, and stand by for further orders. But spread the word quietly."

As Lieutenants Jackson and Swain hurried off to carry out the modified orders, the colonel turned back to Captain Slater and said coldly, "Now, Paul. Tell me exactly what happened."

"Until a few moments ago, sir, there was not the slightest indication of trouble. The Indians listened courteously to the Ladies, spoke courteously, and signed the Pledges the Ladies set before them as meekly as you please. Then, as we started to leave, Chief Five Barrels made a hand sign. Before we could do a thing to prevent it, sir, my squad was surrounded by a group of Indians holding leveled rifles. The rest of the Indians encircled the Ladies and told them they could not go. Louise started to scream——"

"My daughter is in that Indian camp?"

"Yes, sir. She is in charge of the delegation."

"That cursed Woman!" Colonel Gearhart moaned, feeling it quite unnecessary to further identify the object of his wrath. "For the sake of her stupid Cause, she makes my daughter risk her life!" He caught hold of himself. "I'm sorry, Paul—go on, please."

"As I was saying, sir, Louise started to scream, then caught my eye, and stifled her cry. It was as if she realized, sir, that any indication of terror on her part would only spread panic among her followers and make a bad matter worse."

"Good girl!"

"My first impulse, of course, was to react violently. Fortunately, I repressed it. You know how Indians are, sir—they have no respect for a man who loses his head in a tight spot. After I had been disarmed, I quietly confronted Chief Five Barrels and demanded an explanation of his highhanded conduct."

"What did he say?"

"That he intended holding the Ladies as hostages, sir. That they would not be harmed as long as his band was not attacked. That, for a price, he would let them go."

"The devil! And what price is he asking?"

"Twenty wagon loads of whiskey, sir. Plus a guarantee from you that he and his band will not be molested in their return to their home grounds."

"He's crazy!"

"Yes, sir, I strongly suspect he is. But crazy or not, he has captured the Ladies and refuses to release them until his demands are met."

"How can I meet his demands? In the first place, that whiskey is Frank Wallingham's property, not mine. In the second place, giving 200 armed, hostile Indians twenty wagon loads of whiskey would make this whole country run ankle deep with blood. In the third place. . . ." Colonel Gearhart's voice trailed off into impotent silence. "Which is all beside the point, isn't it? Logic can't reach a crazy man."

"Exactly, sir," Captain Slater agreed, nodding. He waited a moment in respectful silence, then said, "What message shall I take back to him, sir?"

"You're not going back to him, Captain. I need you here."

"I must, sir. I gave him my word. And Louise. . . ."

"Let's keep our personal feelings out of this, Captain."

"Yes, sir."

Colonel Gearhart brooded for a time, then nodded reluctantly. "On second thought, we'll need a man with a cool head on him in that Indian camp. Go back and tell Chief Five Barrels I need time to think over his proposition. Tell him the whiskey doesn't belong to me. Tell him I'll have to meet with Frank Wallingham, Mrs. Massingale, Oracle Jones, and the leaders of the Citizens' Militia."

"Yes, sir."

"Warn him that if any harm comes to the Ladies . . . no, wait a minute. That's the wrong approach. Bargain with him. Try to knock down the price. Let him think we're anxious to ransom the hostages."

"In other words, sir, you want me to stall for time."

"That's right."

"Have you formulated a Plan, sir, by which to rescue the Ladies unharmed while at the same time keeping the whiskey out of the hands of the Indians?"

Colonel Gearhart shook his head. "Not yet. But I'm working on one." He reached out and squeezed the young captain's shoulder affectionately. "Tell the Ladies not to worry, will you, Paul? And one young lady in particular——"

"She sent you a personal message, sir."

"Oh?"

"She said do your duty, sir, and not worry about her."

"The spunky little rascal!" Colonel Gearhart growled. He brushed at his eyes with the back of a hand. "I'll do my duty, boy, you can all count on that. And I know exactly what my duty is. As my first step, I'll declare Martial Law. . . ."

During the years that the United States of America has existed as a political entity, lawyers, judges, legislators, and laymen have argued at great length regarding the legal principles underlying the Declaration of Martial Law. Viewed in the realm of Pure Theory, such a declaration appears to be quite simple in both Cause and Effect. An Emergency exists. Authority is required that it may be dealt with. Therefore, all other laws are temporarily suspended and Martial Law reigns supreme.

But man does not live in the realm of Pure Theory; he lives in the world of Practical Facts. And the practical facts of the situation that existed at Oxbow Bend and the measures that were taken to remedy it have been extremely difficult to establish.

If Captain Paul Slater (who had a knack for note-taking, as has been previously shown) had been present at the conference called by Colonel Gearhart, his journal no doubt would have preserved a reliable verbatim report of all that was said and done, which would have saved this narrator a great deal of painstaking, often baffling labor. Lacking such primary source material and being further handicapped by the fact that Colonel Gearhart's original papers implementing the declaration inexplicably have been lost, the author of this investigative document took what seemed to him the only course open to a fair, impartial writer, which was, obviously, to obtain sworn, signed depositions from the parties involved, setting forth the true state of affairs as they later remembered it. Their full (and often lengthy) depositions are included in the Appendix to this report, should the reader care to examine them; however, in the interests of saving space, only the salient points contained therein are synopsized below:

COLONEL GEARHART

Admits that he stated to the assembled leaders of the various groups at approximately 10 P.M. that an Emergency existed, that he described the nature of the Emergency in detail, and that he insisted upon having the Authority to deal with it. However, he claims, his initial request was for Voluntary Co-operation. He admits drawing up a Declaration of Martial Law, reading it, and pointing out the Confiscatory and Compulsory Aid powers it would give him. But his reading of the declaration had as its only purpose, he maintains, the informing of the various leaders as to what he *could* do if forced to the Final Extreme by lack of Voluntary Co-operation.

He categorically denies that his 10 P.M. reading put Martial Law into effect; he likewise denies that said measure was to automatically take effect at 7 A.M. next day if Voluntary Co-operation were not supplied by then; and he therefore disclaims any and all responsibility for loss of civilian property.

FRANK WALLINGHAM

States that Colonel Gearhart peremptorily summoned him to the conference, bluntly told all assembled that he was taking complete charge of everybody and everything in the immediate vicinity of Oxbow Bend, and read a paper so declaring. States that when he (Wallingham) questioned in a perfectly reasonable manner the power of a mere colonel, whose home station was located in Dakota Territory, to declare Martial Law in Colorado Territory without prior authorization in writing from the governor of the Territory or the President of the United States, he (Wallingham) was rudely informed he was out of order and must shut up or face disciplinary action.

Deponent further states he got the impression Colonel Gearhart intended to confiscate all his wagons and their contents, without due process of law, and give same to the Indians in exchange for the hostages said Indians were holding. States that he reveres Womanhood as much as the next man and was most anxious no harm should come to the Ladies, even though their own foolishness had gotten them into their present predicament, but he did not think it moral to give whiskey to Indians under

any circumstances. His own solution to the problem, he says, was to take his wagons on to Denver as expeditiously as possible—thus removing temptation from Indians' reach—and report what had happened to the governor.

However, he concludes, Colonel Gearhart so utterly lost his head that he seized complete Authority, declared Martial Law, and confiscated private property—therefore, the owner of said property (Wallingham) should be justly entitled to full compensation for its loss at retail prices then current in Denver.

CITIZENS' MILITIA

Statement by Clayton Howell, second-in-command, points up the fact that all law—Martial or otherwise—is Greek to him. Recalls argument between Frank Wallingham and Colonel Gearhart, which he could not make heads nor tails of. He did get the impression that the Army intended to take over the wagon train and that Wallingham intended to resist, which put himself and his men between a rock and a hard place, so to speak. States, in conclusion, that the Denver Citizens' Militia was doing its best to be neutral, next day, when events over which nobody seemed to have any control took matters out of everybody's hands—and he guesses it was just as well things turned out the way they did.

ORACLE JONES

States he was at the 10 P.M. meeting, at which a sight of bickering went on, and vaguely affirms that he was "foolin' around somewheres in Oxbow Bend" when the final disaster occurred next day, but maintains he does not "recollect a thing worth mentionin'." Further, deponent sayeth not. . . .

CORA MASSINGALE

States that when Colonel Gearhart called the meeting and explained the seriousness of the situation to the leaders of the various groups, she immediately pledged that her Temperance Marchers would give full Voluntary Co-operation. Her impression was that in reading the tentative Declaration of Martial Law Colonel Gearhart simply was pointing out what he *could* do, should circumstances so require; she felt it her duty to warn

Mr. Wallingham, Mr. Howell, and Mr. Jones that failure on their part to give Voluntary Co-operation would have most serious consequences.

Deponent further states that the attitude of Mr. Wallingham was exceedingly selfish, that he bluntly refused to comply with her perfectly reasonable suggestion to destroy the poison the wagons were carrying and thus render futile the Indians' demands for whiskey, and that he (Wallingham) evinced a much greater regard for the safety of the cargo of his wagons than he did for the safety of the Women captives.

Regarding the events of the next morning, deponent states that to the best of her knowledge Colonel Gearhart did not issue any formal proclamation confiscating Mr. Wallingham's property, and therefore its eventual loss was not ascribable to army negligence but to an Act of God, for which Act, deponent freely admits, she had fervently prayed for days. If Mr. Wallingham should insist on suing somebody, she says, let him sue her for *that*. . . .

It was midnight by the time the meeting broke up. In the angry bickering and emotional turmoil of its final minutes, Colonel Gearhart forgot his earlier determination to detain Oracle Jones for a private word; now, he mused with irritation, he must pay for that oversight by personally searching the camp for the elusive old mountain man, who no doubt had read the colonel's mind and would make himself mighty hard to find. However, the one person that Colonel Gearhart had no desire to converse with privately at this moment—Cora Massingale—had made it a point to linger. Much as it pained him to do so, he spoke to her politely.

"Mrs. Massingale, I know you're exhausted. Everything has been said that can be said; everything will be done that can be done. Please retire and get some rest."

"I'm not a whit more exhausted than you are, Colonel. So far as rest is concerned, until those poor Ladies are rescued I shall get exactly the same amount of sleep you do—which I know will be none."

"Worrying won't help them."

"No, but planning will. My responsibility is as great as yours.

Keep no secrets from me, I pray you—as I shall keep none from you. What is it you plan to do?”

You tell me your secrets and I'll tell you mine. What a typically feminine proposition to make! Not even his late wife, whom he had loved dearly, had dared to intrude on the privacy of his thoughts and ask that he confide military decisions he had made to her before he revealed them to his subordinate officers. Yet this Woman had the nerve to ask—nay, demand—that he take her into his confidence. He sighed in utter weariness. Well, why not?

“I plan to do the only thing I can do, Mrs. Massingale,” he said quietly. “Ransom the captives with the only coin the Indians will accept—whiskey.”

“How much whiskey?”

“The original price set by Chief Five Barrels was twenty wagon loads. Captain Slater is bargaining with him now in an attempt to reduce the amount. But no matter what final price is agreed upon, I intend to pay it tomorrow morning.”

“No matter how violently Mr. Wallingham objects?”

“We have fifteen wagon loads under our control now. That may suffice. If not, I shall confiscate whatever additional amount is required from Mr. Wallingham’s train—by force of arms if necessary.”

“How will the ransom trade be arranged?”

“It will be a very ticklish matter, Mrs. Massingale, and may take some time. Chief Five Barrels is cunning. He knows that the minute the hostages are safely out of his camp it will be surrounded by my troops. Therefore, I suspect he will insist that a certain amount of whiskey be delivered to a neutral point in exchange for a certain number of captives. One wagon load, say, for two or three women. His band will break up into small groups. As soon as a group is given its whiskey, it will divide the plunder and scatter to the four winds.”

“And any move on your part to send soldiers in pursuit,” Mrs. Massingale said, nodding thoughtfully, “will jeopardize the safety of the remaining hostages?”

“Exactly.”

“Which will mean, I assume, that by the time the last of my poor ladies are freed, 200 wild Indians will be scattered for miles

over the countryside, murderously drunk, eager to burn, pillage, and kill."

"I sadly fear so, Mrs. Massingale. However, I have taken measures to prevent as much of their anticipated violence as possible. Two hours ago I dispatched couriers to Denver, Cheyenne, and Julesburg with messages alerting all citizens to the expected danger and requesting all available troops to police the country."

"Please don't think I'm being critical, Colonel Gearhart, but did you seriously consider my suggestion to destroy the poison and thus remove the cause of the controversy?"

Colonel Gearhart nodded. "I considered it very seriously, Mrs. Massingale. But there are fifty White Women in that Indian camp. Do we dare enrage the Indians? To put it bluntly, do we dare permit their greeds and lusts—which are now concentrated solely on alcohol—to turn in another direction?"

"Oh no!" Mrs. Massingale exclaimed, turning pale. "I'd never forgive myself if that happened!"

"Then you understand the reasoning behind my decision."

"Yes," Cora Massingale said slowly, a growing respect in her eyes as she gazed at him, "and I understand a great deal more. Because of my selfishness, because of my obstinacy, because of my stupidity in not listening to your excellent advice, I have put you into a position where no matter what you do you will appear in the eyes of your superiors and the public to have been wrong."

"There will be criticism, yes, I have no doubt of that."

"Criticism! Why, Colonel Gearhart, when the word spreads that you supplied 200 Indians with whiskey you'll be crucified! No one will bother to listen to your justification for your act. The public, the press, the Indian Bureau, the War Department—all will condemn you in the strongest possible terms! Your career will be ruined!"

"That well may be. But if by sacrificing my career I can save the lives of fifty women, I will face the future with a clear conscience."

"And I will feel guilty," Mrs. Massingale said softly, "all the rest of my life."

Struck by a sudden odd sense of unreality, Colonel Gearhart recalled a stage play he had once seen whose theme had been

Mature Love and the Nobility of Sacrifice and whose Hero and Heroine had spoken lines remarkably like the words just said. Right about now, violins should be singing softly, backed by cellos, low drumbeats, and trumpets muted to sound far off. Angrily he willed the memory away; briskly he rubbed his left cheek, whose muscles were beginning to twitch.

"Is your headache bad?" Mrs. Massingale said sympathetically.

"Not at all. By the way, do you have any idea where Oracle Jones got off to?"

"No, but I'm sure I can find him for you. Would you like me to?"

"I'd like to talk to him, yes. Truth is, I had hoped he would be more helpful. He's well acquainted with Chief Five Barrels. And he seems to know what everybody in the white camp is going to do long before they do it. I'm sure he could give me a lot of valuable information—if he only would."

"Oh pshaw!" Mrs. Massingale said contemptuously. "If it's just information you want, ask me. I don't claim to have visions, as he does, but I do know what's going on." She smiled mysteriously. "In fact, I'll wager I know several things *he* doesn't know."

Colonel Gearhart frowned. "For example?"

"Well, for example, I know that the trail he marked out through Quicksand Bottoms isn't marked any more——"

"What trail?"

"Oh, hadn't you heard, Colonel? One of my ladies told me about it. You see, while we were staging our torchlight parade around Mr. Wallingham's wagons, she slipped out of ranks and hid in one of the wagons——"

"For what purpose?"

"To destroy the whiskey, of course. As originally laid out, Colonel Gearhart, our Plan was to get a woman into each wagon, where she would remain quietly until the camp fell asleep; then she would go to work on the barrels with whatever puncturing tools she had managed to borrow or steal from the sources available to her——"

"That's the most preposterous thing I ever heard of!"

"The so-called Weaker Sex, Colonel Gearhart, long ago learned that where Strength fails Cleverness succeeds. Sleight-

of-hand artists have made use of the Diversionary Principle for centuries. It's really quite simple. All one need do is attract attention by doing something outlandish in one area, while the real purpose is being unobtrusively accomplished in another. Mr. Wallingham's teamsters were so concerned making sure we didn't set fire to their wagons with our torches that they neglected to notice what was happening in the spaces of darkness between."

"Do you mean to say some of your Ladies actually managed to slip unseen into Wallingham's wagons?"

"Indeed I do. At this very moment, Colonel Gearhart, there is a determined Temperance Marcher concealed in each and every wagon, patiently awaiting my orders. Of course, as soon as I learned what had happened in the Indian camp, I passed word to them to postpone all actions until they heard further from me."

"How on earth could you do that?"

"Quite simply, Colonel. We set up a code, you see, by which messages might be transmitted in the hymns we sing."

Abraham Lincoln had committed a great error, Colonel Gearhart decided, in not insisting that Women as well as men be drafted for military service. Come to think about it, there *had* been rumors during the Civil War—hotly denied, of course—that the ingenious Union strategy which had split the very heart of the South as an iron wedge splits a piece of firewood—had originated in the mind of a Female. Until now, he had not given those rumors the slightest credence. But now, he wondered. . . .

"You were saying something about a trail, Mrs. Massingale, marked out through Quicksand Bottoms."

"Oh yes! Did it not strike you as very odd, Colonel, that Oracle Jones should lead Mr. Wallingham's wagons so far into Ox-bow Bend before letting them make camp?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, that's one of the things I wanted to talk to him about."

"It puzzled one of my ladies, too. I have no knowledge of this country, of course, but she does. Her father was a trader, she says, and well acquainted with the Indians. As a child, years ago, she recalls hearing an Indian tell him a fantastic story about a

white man who mysteriously vanished when cornered by the Indians at the edge of Quicksand Bottoms. Her father maintained that there must be some sort of trail across the Bottoms, but he never got the opportunity to find out for himself."

"And she did?"

"So she tells me. She was something of a tomboy, it seems, and, being a woman, naturally curious. At any rate, she did find the trail. So tonight when she happened to overhear Rafe Pike and Clayton Howell talking about Mr. Wallingham's wagons sneaking away from us tomorrow morning, she knew at once how the trick would be done. She slipped out of the wagon, found the marked trail, followed it down to the river——"

"In the dark?" Colonel Gearhart said incredulously.

"The moon was still up at the time, if you'll recall, and she is a most resourceful lady. The stakes had pieces of cloth tied to them and were set in pairs, she found, spaced so that there would just be room for a wagon to be driven between them. As she returned from the river, she pulled them all up, threw them away, rejoined the torchlight parade, and reported what she had done to me."

And you will of course mention her deed in your reports, General Massingale, Colonel Gearhart mused absently, *and recommend that she be awarded a medal.* Despite the seriousness of the moment, he chuckled softly. "You're a wonder, Cora! I'd give a month's pay to see the look on Oracle Jones' face tomorrow morning when he discovers his markers are gone. Of course the delay will only be temporary, for it won't take him long to mark out the trail again."

"That has occurred to me, Thaddeus," Mrs. Massingale answered, apparently just as willing to drop formality as he was. "But suppose you sent for him and detained him in your camp on some pretext——"

"By God, that's the answer!" Colonel Gearhart exclaimed, pounding his right fist into his left palm. "If necessary, I'll put him under arrest!"

"Would it not be better to let him think we think he is on our side? After all, he has made a great effort to cultivate our good will so that we *would* think exactly that."

"You're absolutely right! I'll tell him I need his help in ran-

soming the Ladies. He'll think that all my attention will be concentrated on that and that by pretending to help me he'll be giving the Wallingham wagons a perfect opportunity to sneak away through the Bottoms along the trail he *thinks* he has clearly staked out." Colonel Gearhart threw back his head and laughed. "I'd give another month's pay to see Frank Wallingham's face when he tries to move those wagons!"

Rapid hoof beats sounded out in the dark, stilling the colonel's laughter. As Captain Slater dismounted and crisply saluted, Colonel Gearhart said impatiently, "How are things going, Paul?"

"As well as could be expected under the circumstances, sir. The Ladies are being treated courteously. Chief Five Barrels has agreed to permit a wagon loaded with blankets, kettles, cups, tea, or whatever else they may require for their comfort to be sent up to his camp."

"I'll take care of that myself," Mrs. Massingale said. "Those poor dears! Are they frightened, Captain?"

"I have never seen a braver group of people in my life, Mrs. Massingale. Rather than fright, their mood is indignation. They feel betrayed. After all, they keep pointing out to Chief Five Barrels, he and every Indian in his band *did* sign the Pledge——"

"Really?" Mrs. Massingale interrupted, a sudden gleam of interest coming into her eyes. "What happened to those signed Pledges, Captain Slater?"

"I have them right here. Louise felt they should be placed in your hands as evidence that she and her delegation did do their bit for the Cause."

"Thank you, Captain." Riffing through the thick sheaf of letter-sized, printed sheets, she pursed her lips, then looked sharply at Colonel Gearhart and said, "Do you realize that in signing these Pledges and then immediately violating them, the Indians have placed themselves in a morally untenable position, Colonel?"

"Oh, an Indian will sign anything if he thinks he stands to gain by it," Colonel Gearhart answered gruffly. "So far as morals go, the devils we're dealing with don't have any."

"Nevertheless, these are extremely important documents.

They could save us both from a great deal of criticism in the future."

"Right now, I'm interested only in the present. Did you reach a final agreement, Paul, on the number of wagon loads of whiskey to be paid for the captives?"

"Yes, sir. I told Chief Five Barrels ten was the absolute limit. He kept demanding twenty. After a great deal of haggling, we finally agreed to a compromise. He will settle for fifteen."

"Good! That's exactly the number of wagons we now have under our control. Which means we won't be forced to a showdown with Frank Wallingham, after all."

"May I ask a question, sir?"

"Certainly."

"Those fifteen wagons and their contents *are* Mr. Wallingham's property. Have you given any consideration as to how he will be reimbursed for their loss?"

Colonel Gearhart shook his head. "I'm a soldier, Paul, not a lawyer. When an Emergency exists, a soldier does what must be done, makes his report through proper channels, then lets the chips fall where they may. I will give Mr. Wallingham a written statement, acknowledging the fact that I took fifteen wagon loads of whiskey from him—"

"You will do no such thing!" Cora Massingale interrupted brusquely. "It was my group that immobilized those wagons. It is my group that controls them now. It is my ladies who are being held captives and must be ransomed. Therefore, it is I—and I alone—who will be appropriating Mr. Wallingham's property and disposing of it. You, Colonel Gearhart, will be acting merely as my transmitting agent."

"Please, Cora, I refuse to hide behind your skirts."

"Fiddlesticks! Don't you realize I *want* Mr. Wallingham to sue me?"

"You're not a wealthy woman, you once told me. If he got a judgment against you—as he surely would—he'd take everything you own."

Throwing back her head, Mrs. Massingale laughed heartily. "Everything I own indeed! Aren't you familiar with the laws of our beloved country as regards the property rights of married women and widows, Colonel Gearhart? Don't you know that

when a woman marries she and her husband become one person in the eyes of the law—and that one person is the husband? Are you not aware of the fact that when the husband dies he may will his house, his money, his furniture—yes, even control of his children—to any person he cares to designate, leaving his wife penniless, childless, and totally dependent on the charity of relatives?”

“No,” Colonel Gearhart said humbly, “I was not aware of these things until now.”

“Well, I’ve been aware of them for a long while. It’s no great fun to be a Crusader, believe me, to be jeered at, laughed at, insulted, and abused in unspeakable ways. Yes, I believe in Temperance. Any woman who has gone through what I’ve gone through would believe in it, too. But give me the Vote, give me Equal Rights in courts of law, give me Equality with men in the control of my property and my children—and I’ll gladly let every man who so desires drink himself blind every day of the year. What I’m trying to say is . . . oh my goodness, this isn’t a lecture platform, is it? What was I trying to say?”

“I believe it had something to do with Mr. Wallingham’s suing you,” Captain Slater said politely.

“Ah, yes! According to law, a woman may be sued and her property taken to settle any judgment against her. I would gladly risk the few hundred dollars’ worth of property left to me after three drunken, selfish, profligate husbands for the sake of the million dollars’ worth of publicity such a suit would bring to the Temperance and Suffrage Causes. So please, Colonel Gearhart, let me do this my way.”

“Well, settling the question of liability can wait until the deed is done,” Colonel Gearhart said uncomfortably. “The important thing now is to do it right.” He looked inquiringly at Captain Slater. “Have you and Chief Five Barrels worked out the physical details of the exchange?”

They had, Captain Slater replied. With his usual thoroughness, he explained in detail exactly what the procedure would be. As soon as it became light enough to see tomorrow morning, the mule teams were to be hitched up to the fifteen freight wagons. On signal from the Indian camp, one unarmed soldier was to drive the first wagon to a point half a mile distant from both

the Army and Indian camps and there turn over the reins to an Indian driver. At that moment, three White Women would be permitted to leave the camp of the Indians. When they had reached safety, another wagon would be started toward the neutral point; when the wagon reached it, another three Women would be released, and so on until the exchange had been completed.

"Actually, the way it figures out," Captain Slater said, "each wagon is being traded for three and one third captives. So with the third, sixth, ninth, twelfth, and fifteenth wagons, four rather than three Ladies will be released. I made sure Chief Five Barrels understood and agreed to that."

"I'm relieved no end," Colonel Gearhart grunted. "His releasing three and a third Ladies for each wagon would complicate matters considerably, I fear."

Captain Slater flushed. "Sir, I'm only trying to do my duty as I see it."

"Sorry, Paul—that was a stupid thing for me to say. Blame it on nerves. When the pressure mounts, I have the bad habit of getting testy."

"May I ask the captain a question, Colonel Gearhart?" Mrs. Massingale said hesitantly.

"Certainly."

"Does Chief Five Barrels understand the meaning of the Pledges which he and his followers signed?"

"Perfectly."

"They know, then, that they have given their solemn oath before God and man never to touch alcoholic beverages again for as long as they live?"

"Louise says the Pledges were read to them in both English and their own tongue before they were permitted to sign them."

"Good! When you go back to his camp, Captain Slater, I want you to warn Chief Five Barrels that the instant he or his followers let alcohol pass their lips they are eternally damned."

"Certainly, ma'am, I'll tell him," Captain Slater said, looking dubious. "But what good it will do, if any, I can't say."

Colonel Gearhart nodded approvingly. "It can't do any harm, Paul. After all, Indians are mighty superstitious people. And Chief Five Barrels is sly enough to know the wisdom of getting

out of our sight before he commits his orneriness. He has the cockeyed notion that what we don't see him do we can't prove, which will let him lie to his heart's content to the next Peace Commission that's sent out to pacify him."

"In other words, sir, you're hoping that those Indians won't get drunk until the Ladies are safely ransomed?"

"Right." Colonel Gearhart looked at Cora Massingale. "Any other thoughts before we let Paul go?"

"No," Mrs. Massingale said slowly, shaking her head. Turning, she gazed thoughtfully at the spot in which the fifteen wagons encircled by a contingent of Temperance Marchers were parked. "Oh yes, there is one more thing—although I doubt that it has any bearing on our problem."

"What's that?"

"Those fifteen wagons aren't loaded with whiskey, I'm told. They're loaded with French champagne."

Colonel Gearhart repressed an impulse to break into a fit of hysterical laughter. "Oh Lord! No wonder Frank Wallingham is having a fit! This will cost him a small fortune! Are you sure they're loaded with champagne, Cora?"

"Positive. In the first place, Louise got the information directly from Mr. O'Flaherty. In the second place, some of my ladies have already gotten into the wagons and found boxes filled with bottles instead of barrels. They pried some of the boxes open, they said, and found little wire thingamajigs holding corks in the bottles——"

"They didn't undo the wires, I hope!"

"They had just started to when I stopped them." She frowned at him. "How else can you open a bottle and pour out its poison if you don't undo the little wire thingamajig?"

Colonel Gearhart groaned. "You tell her, Paul. The mere thought of the awful fate in store for that imported French champagne leaves me speechless."

With his usual precise choice of words, Paul Slater patiently explained to Mrs. Massingale that, in view of the fact that champagne continued to work in the bottle and create a gas, the agitation of movement, the changes in temperature, and the thinner air of the High Plains country in which they were presently encamped would build up such a differential in the pres-

tures inside and outside of the bottles that opening them would be a project to be undertaken only with a great deal of care.

"Do you mean to say," Mrs. Massingale said disbelievingly, "that when a person opens a bottle of champagne it is apt to explode in his face?"

"There is a quite marked report, yes. And if the contents of the bottle have been unduly agitated, often a great deal of the champagne foams out and is wasted."

"Ugh!" Mrs. Massingale exclaimed, making a face. "It sounds like terrible stuff to drink!"

Colonel Gearhart and Captain Slater exchanged glances but made no reply. Cora Massingale looked thoughtful.

"Won't the Indians feel cheated when they find out they've been given this frothy, bubbly stuff instead of whiskey? Won't they get awfully angry?"

"Their first reaction will be surprise, I predict," Colonel Gearhart answered patiently, "from which state they will make a speedy recovery as soon as they sample the contents of the bottles." He sighed. "After all, it isn't every day that a wild Indian is given the opportunity to partake without limit of a beverage whose retail price laid down in Cheyenne is five dollars a quart."

"You seem to speak with authority, Thaddeus."

"I do, Cora. You see, tentative plans have been made to relieve me of the care and company of my only child. To celebrate this happy event, I had considered holding a reception for the bridal couple at which appropriate toasts might be drunk in proper style. However, when I compared my financial resources with the price quotations given me by Cheyenne dealers. . . ." He broke off abruptly. "But that's unimportant now. The brutal facts, Cora, are that these Indians will drink anything that has alcohol in it. And they'll get just as soddenly drunk on five-dollar champagne as they will on one-dollar whiskey, believe me."

"I suppose you're right," Mrs. Massingale said, nodding. "Still, I'm intrigued by the knowledge of what will happen when they open those bottles."

Climactic events of historical significance are always extremely difficult to narrate accurately and with complete fairness to all the parties involved. Even when those parties give full co-operation to the historian by testifying freely, by allowing him unlimited access to all relevant papers, journals, and reports, and by helpfully answering any and all questions he may wish to ask them in order to clarify cloudy points, the task of establishing exactly what happened at a specific time and place is a laborious one. When the parties refuse to co-operate, it becomes next to impossible.

In the opinion of this special investigator, the world will never learn the full truth regarding the Disaster of Oxbow Bend. Blame for that fact lies squarely on the shoulders of the participants, whose reticence may be ascribed to a number of motives, none of which are germane to this document and therefore need not be elaborated upon.

When the Full Truth cannot be ascertained, the only thing the factual writer can do is turn to the field of Logical Supposition. Knowing as he does that no one can prove him wrong, he is immediately faced with the temptation of allowing his fancy full rein and filling in the blank spaces with entertaining bits of exciting action, flowery description, and dramatic dialogue. Such a temptation has been sternly resisted by the author of this report, however, for he feels he has a reputation as a reliable news writer to maintain.

What follows, then, although not substantiated by sworn affidavits, firsthand testimony, or directly quotable eyewitness statements, is a fair-minded man's summary of what may logically be assumed did happen at Oxbow Bend. In order to clarify

the shifting positions and movements of the parties involved, diagrams have been inserted in appropriate places. Let us first trace the movements of:

MRS. CORA MASSINGALE

Immediately following her conversation with Colonel Gearhart, she goes to the main camp of the Wallingham wagons at the edge of Quicksand Bottoms in search of Oracle Jones, finds him, and requests his help in ransoming the captives. He says he will be happy to oblige.

She then tells Frank Wallingham she is appropriating fifteen of his wagons and offers him a statement she has written to that effect in order to simplify his suing her for damages. He refuses to accept the statement, saying that he will sue whomever he wishes to sue whenever he wishes to do so and will need no statement from her to implement his desires.

Much to his astonishment, she then turns away from him, calls out a command, and the sixty-five Temperance Marchers hidden in the sixty-five parked wagons climb out, form ranks behind her, and follow her back to the Ladies' camp at the upper end of Oxbow Bend. Although they are carrying a wide assortment of puncturing tools, such as Bowie knives, butcher knives, hatchets, hammers, crowbars, augers, jack handles, iron spikes, sabers, rocks, and hatpins, they have not as yet damaged the whiskey barrels, Frank Wallingham discovers. Considerably shaken by the ease with which his security measures have been violated, he trebles the armed guard around his wagons.

COLONEL GEARHART

When Mrs. Massingale returns with her sixty-five Ladies, he suggests that the blockading buggies and wagons of the Temperance Marchers be removed from the exit to Oxbow Bend, for it is his considered opinion that as soon as Frank Wallingham and the Citizens' Militia learn tomorrow morning that they cannot escape across Quicksand Bottoms they will make a determined effort to break out of the trap in which they find themselves by crashing through the blockade.

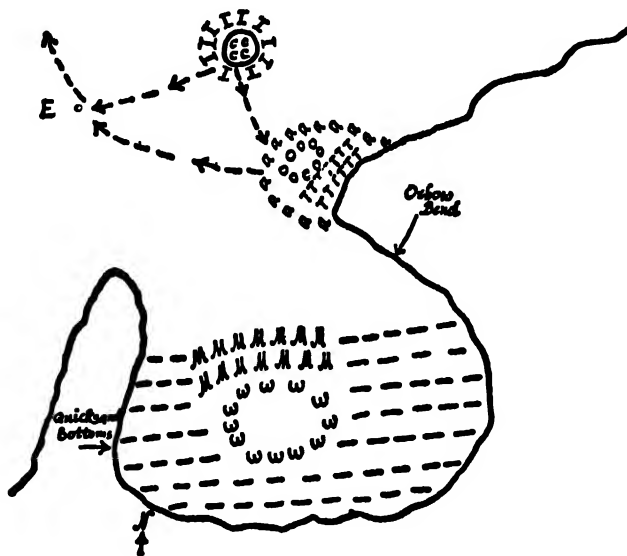
It is never good strategy to be put into a position where one

must maintain two fronts simultaneously; he further points out; therefore, it is his recommendation that the blockade be lifted, that the Ladies consolidate their camp at a point somewhat to the east of the entrance of Oxbow Bend, and that the forces under his command throw a protective screen around the Temperance Marchers on grounds more easily defensible than those presently occupied.

Having learned by now to respect the colonel's advice, Mrs. Massingale readily agrees to all his suggestions; the necessary orders are issued, and within the space of two hours are quietly carried out.

It is now 2:30 A.M. After a period of calm, the wind has sprung up from a northwesterly direction, is very cold, and is carrying a few scattered flakes of snow.

The distribution of forces now looks like this:



Code: "I"—Indians
 "C"—Captives
 "E"—Exchange Point.
 "A"—Army

"O"—O'Flaherty (formerly) wagons

"T"—Temperance Marchers

"M"—Citizens' Militia

"W"—Wallingham Train

The broken lines and directional arrows, of course, indicate the agreed-upon routes to be taken by the wagons, by the Captives, and by the Indians during and immediately following the ransom transaction. At the proper place in this report, another diagram will be inserted showing the deviations therefrom.

ORACLE JONES

As he has promised Mrs. Massingale he will do, he goes to the Indian camp and confers with Chief Five Barrels, Captain Paul Slater, and Louise Gearhart, his primary objective being to make sure all the parties to the coming exchange understand how it is to be carried out. All of them do. He finds the Ladies nervous, the soldiers uneasy, and Chief Five Barrels jubilant over the brilliant success of his strategy.

Knowing that the exchange of the fifteen wagons for the fifty captives will take some time and be a perfect cover for the escape of the rest of the Wallingham wagons through Quicksand Bottoms, Oracle feels it his duty to see that it goes off well, so he remains in the Indian camp and keeps a close watch over Chief Five Barrels. In accordance with Indian custom, he learns, wagons one, two, and three will become the sole property of the cunning chief whose brain has devised this bloodless coup; wagons four and five will be taken over by sub-chiefs Walks-Stooped-Over and Elk Runner; with the remaining ten wagons to be divided on a catch-as-catch-can basis among the slightly less than 200 rank-and-file warriors engaged in the present enterprise.

During a late-hour council, all this has been worked out among the Indians by arranging short lengths of sticks in a precise order on the ground, Oracle discovers, but he senses as he circulates about the camp that the rank-and-file warriors are thirsty, impatient, and not possessed of as orderly thought processes as their brilliant leader. Having been present on a number of occasions when issues of beef on the hoof were being made to

reservation Indians or buffalo were being hunted by wild Indians, Oracle knows how quickly order can dissolve into chaos. He does not need to have a Vision to predict that, with alcohol the prize, the Best-Laid Plans may go awry.

As dawn nears and the camp begins to stir, he covertly passes the word to Captain Slater to be ready for anything.

CAPTAIN PAUL SLATER

Military man that he is, he is horrified to learn from Oracle Jones that instead of being the last Indian to leave the camp, as a conscientious commander should do, Chief Five Barrels intends to be the first, and that the sub-chiefs immediately under him intend to follow hot on his heels. This means that the remaining Indians will be leaderless; thus, the slightest hitch or misunderstanding can turn them into a wild, vengeful, undisciplined mob.

The captain hotly tells Oracle that they *must* register a strong protest with Chief Five Barrels; Oracle replies, "Don't bother; just cross your fingers, hold your breath, and hope there ain't no hitch."

CHIEF FIVE BARRELS

Aware of the fact that he cannot drive three wagons simultaneously, he appoints two relatives whom he trusts to a reasonable degree to take over and drive wagons number two and three. What they are to do, he explains, is tie their riding ponies to the rear of the wagons, lash the mules into a dead run, and follow in his wagon's tracks as he makes a beeline in a north-westerly direction toward the Sioux country. On pain of death, they are not to take a drink of firewater until he gives them permission to do so; furthermore, should any greedy, drunken Indians less favored in alcoholic possessions than they overtake them and attempt to appropriate their hard-come-by treasures, the three wagons are to be halted on signal, corralled tongue to tailgate White Man style, and the newly acquired Property defended to the last bullet and the last drop.

FRANK WALLINGHAM

After sleeplessly patrolling the wagon enclosure through what is left of the night, he rouses Rafe Pike an hour before dawn, tells him to start the teamsters to hitching up, and sends a messenger to the near-by camp of the Citizens' Militia with the word that the men there must be ready to ride as soon as it is light enough to see the stakes marking out the trail through Quicksand Bottoms. Breakfast must wait until the Bottoms and the river have been crossed, for the wind now is carrying a considerable amount of snow and he wants to be well south of the Platte before the full force of the coming blizzard strikes.

COLONEL GEARHART

He has not slept either. As the darkness of night pales into gray, murky daylight, he restlessly paces the outer perimeter of his lines, his alert mind ready to deal with any contingency. Sheltered behind a half circle of parked buggies and wagons, each of whose extremity is anchored on the river, are the Ladies. Fifty yards farther out, the troopers of Company "D," prepared to fight dismounted, are dug in, determined to die where they lie before permitting any hostile penetration into the camp of the Temperance Marchers. Directly in front of the center of the Company "D" line, Company "A," the finest Indian fighters in the West, stands to horse, an instantly mobile force, ready to be led where most urgently needed. Waiting on the left flank are the fifteen ransom wagons, each manned by an unarmed soldier driver, ready to roll at the proper moment.

Fine pellets of hard-driven snow lash into the colonel's face as he peers anxiously up the slope toward the Indian camp. He can see movement there, though the light is yet too poor to permit him to distinguish its nature. Removing a gauntlet, he fumbles his watch out of his pocket and stares at it, as if by that gesture he can hasten the coming of day. It appears to say a quarter to three. Shaking his head in disbelief, he wipes the face of the timepiece, shifts it about, and holds it closer to his eyes. It does say a quarter to three. He holds it to his right ear, hears no tick, remembers he has not wound it for two days, returns it to his pocket with a snort of disgust, looks up the slope

again—and sees Captain Slater waving a white rag tied to a stick, twice to the right, then twice to the left.

“That’s the signall” he calls to the driver of the first wagon. “Move out!”

A whip cracks, the fidgety mule teams lunge forward against their traces, the wagon wheels turn.

The Ransom of the Captives has begun.

RAFE PIKE

Knowing from long experience exactly how much maneuvering space a six-mule freight wagon requires and how to transform a static corral into a moving train with the greatest economy of time and effort, he reins his saddle horse alongside the proper wagon to indicate that it shall take the number-one position, lifts his arm, spurs his horse forward, then gives the signal to roll out. He peers through the gloom and snowflakes for sight of the first pair of stakes, whose location has been carefully pointed out to him the previous evening by Oracle Jones. He cannot find them. He swears heartily, signals for the wagons behind him to halt, dismounts, and walks cautiously forward.

This is where the trail begins, he is sure, right between these two low, grass-covered hummocks. A flash of red catches his eye. A stake, by God, lying flat on the ground, blown down by the wind, carelessly set, or. . . .

The ground gives way under his feet. He screams. Cold, clinging, wet, soup-like sand sucks him down to his knees, to his thighs, to his armpits. Then a loop of rope falls over his desperately flailing arms, draws tight, and arrests his downward descent. Vaguely he hears a man calling for help to pull him free. . . .

MRS. CORA MASSINGALE

Despite the colonel’s protests, she insists on leaving the relative safety of the Temperance Marchers’ camp and standing beside him as the first wagon lumbers up the slope toward the Exchange Point. Her breath is coming fast. She feels faint. The colonel glances down at her and smiles reassuringly. Wondering how he can be so rock-like and confident at such a moment,

she does something she has never before done in her adult life, reaching out for his proffered arm, putting her hand through its crook, and gratefully leaning upon its muscled strength.

The mules pulling the wagons are uneasy, disliking the snow driving into their faces, and despite their driver's efforts to hold them to a walk they keep breaking into an uneven trot. Now a mounted Indian leaves the camp up the slope and rides toward the Exchange Point. The courses of driven wagon and ridden horse converge. The near mule of the lead pair tries vainly to kick the near mule of the swing pair, which has apparently done something to displease him, and the latter lunges forward in an equally vain attempt to bite his would-be attacker, causing a momentary tangle that the trooper driver straightens out only after considerable effort.

"Oh Lord!" Colonel Gearhart groans. "A runaway now would fix things good!"

Cora Massingale closes her eyes and fervently prays that the mules will behave.

The wagon reaches the Exchange Point and comes to a halt. The Indian dismounts, ties his horse to the tailgate, and changes places with the driver, who immediately heads back to his home base on the double. Cora Massingale turns her hopeful gaze toward the Indian camp. Three women detach themselves from the milling mass there and come stumbling down the slope in frenzied desperation.

"Thank Heaven!" Mrs. Massingale breathes. "The Indians are keeping their word!"

She hears a wild, victorious whoop from the direction of the Exchange Point, a whip crack, a clatter of hoofs, and wagon number one lurches off into the gloom of the day. Again Captain Slater waves the white flag twice to the right and twice to the left. Colonel Gearhart calls out.

"Wagon number two—on your way!"

Something in the tone of his voice warns Cora Massingale that the deed is but one fifteenth done. Anxiously she watches and waits, clinging tightly to the colonel's iron-muscled right arm.

FRANK WALLINGHAM

Angrily stills the turbulent argument over what has happened to the stakes so carefully set by Oracle Jones, saying he never has *really* trusted that drunken, sanctimonious, vision-seeing old fraud anyway, and from now on, by God, he doesn't intend to trust anybody's judgment but his own. What are we going to do? Why, gentlemen, we're going to lay whip into the mules, turn their heads north, and take the wagons out of Oxbow Bend the same way we brought them in! If the Temperance Marchers or soldiers try to stop us, we'll run right over them!

CITIZENS' MILITIA

A scout sent out to reconnoiter the mouth of Oxbow Bend gallops up to Clayton Howell, shouting the good news that the blockade has been lifted. Greatly relieved, the second-in-command leader of the Militia tells him to pass that word along to Frank Wallingham and to inform him that the Militia will lead the way and defend the wagons against attacks from all quarters. Placing himself at the head of the Volunteers, he rises in his stirrups, waves his arm in a forward motion, and cries, "Denver, here we come!"

COLONEL GEARHART

Though it is now broad daylight, the snow is falling so thick and the wind is blowing so hard he can no longer see the Exchange Point nor the Indian camp. But all seems to be progressing as planned, for every few minutes a trooper driver and three or four Women Captives come running breathlessly into the safety of the army lines.

"Wagon number six!" he shouts. "Move out!"

CHIEF FIVE BARRELS

As the wagon he is driving careens at breakneck speed into the worsening snowstorm, he glances back, sees that wagons number two and three are following close behind, throws back his head, and howls a triumphant Sioux war cry at the leaden sky. The mules run faster. Shifting the lines to his left hand, he reaches back into the wagon bed to affectionately pat his re-

cently acquired treasure, discovers to his surprise that the lid has been pried off one of the boxes, fumbles inside, and pulls out a bottle. He laughs with glee. This is a real prize, he knows, for run-of-the-mill firewater comes in barrels or tins, with only the best grade packaged in individual bottles. He is cold. He is thirsty. It is no trick at all to hold the lines in his left hand, place the bottle between his legs, and undo the already partially loosened wire thingamajig with his right hand. Once that little task is done, he tells himself, he can pull the stopper with his teeth. . . .

The world explodes in his face. He is mortally wounded. He knows that, for he is lying flat on his back atop the boxes in the wagon bed, is completely blind, and can feel his brains and life blood oozing out through the big hole made squarely in the center of his forehead. No, not completely blind, for now he can distinguish the canvas wagon top above him. The mules are bolting in panic. The boxes under him are punishing his body. He sits up, brushing the blood out of his eyes with the back of a hand, licking the blood running down his face away from his lips with his tongue. It is the queerest-flavored blood he has ever tasted.

His vision now back to normal, he stares down and makes the remarkable discovery that he is still holding the opened bottle in his right hand. It is a quarter full of frothy, foamy liquid. He lifts the bottle to his lips and drinks. The taste is odd but not unpleasant. It resembles firewater and it resembles the bubbling hot spring water he once tasted out in the Crow country; and yet it seems to be neither. Ah, well! It is good. Finish the bottle, he decides, then crawl to the back of the wagon, vault atop the riding pony trailing there, gallop ahead, and regain control of the runaway mules. Stupid creatures, mules! No self-respecting Sioux would be caught dead riding or driving one unless forced to by dire necessity. However, once they have pulled the wagons home, they will make meat. . . .

Underfoot, the lid of a box gives way. There is a sudden explosion, then another and another. The wagon jolts sideways. In the process of untying the lead rope of his riding pony, Chief Five Barrels sails over the tailgate, flies through the air, strikes the ground, and goes tumbling end over end. For a moment he

loses his senses. But being an Indian and a warrior, he does not lose his grip on the long grass rope tied halter fashion around his pony's neck and nose.

As he stumbles to his feet and dizzily starts to clamber aboard his pony, wagons number two and three clatter past him. They appear to be driverless. But from within, as they vanish into the snow-swept morning, he hears the sound of explosions. Kicking his pony angrily in the ribs, he rides at a dead run to head off the runaways.

CAPTAIN PAUL SLATER

Sound is his only guide now, for the thick-falling snow obscures his view of both the Exchange Point and the army lines. The sounds around him are growing increasingly confused. With their leaders gone, the Indians have become a mounted, milling, frantically excited mass—laughing, chanting, arguing, howling. At the moment, they are paying no attention to the shivering Women Captives. Following the captain's earlier orders, the eight unarmed troopers have unobtrusively placed themselves in a thin line between the savages and the Ladies, determined to sell their lives as dearly as they can in case of a hostile move. Captain Slater is obeying the rules of the exchange to the letter. Hearing another wagon move out from the army lines, he shouts to Oracle Jones.

"Number six!"

Oracle cries out something in the Sioux tongue. Yipping happily, a group of Indians spur their ponies toward the Exchange Point. Captain Slater puts a mark on his tally sheet and calls, "Four Ladies, this time! Four Ladies, front and center!"

COLONEL GEARHART

"Hold it, number seven! Hold up, I say!"

"I'm trying, sir! But these crazy mules—I!"

"Give him some help there, Sergeant! Damn it, number eight, can't you control your teams? Lieutenant Dirks, get some men to straighten out that tangle between number nine and ten! If we're not careful, the whole confounded bunch will break loose and——"

A shot sounds inside one of the wagons. This strikes the

colonel as queer, for he has given strict orders that none of the drivers be armed. A shot? No, a pop. Like a champagne cork. . . .

"Hold up! Hold up!" he cries, thrusting Cora out of harm's way as the mules break loose from the troopers trying to restrain them.

But the mules cannot be held. As he watches helplessly, wagons number seven through fifteen thunder past him and vanish into the snow-swept day. . . .

INDIANS

They hear the mules bolt and the remaining wagons thunder into the teeth of the storm. As one man, they kick their ponies into a dead run, yipping ecstatically. This promises to be better sport than live beef issues or wild buffalo hunts ever were!

CAPTAIN PAUL SLATER

He has no clear idea of what is happening, but the Indians are gone and he sees no reason to linger any longer in this spot. With the quick mental reflexes of a Born Leader, he rushes to the side of Louise Gearhart, plants her firmly in front of the disorganized mass of panic-stricken Temperance Marchers, and shouts a crisp order.

"Fall in! Form a column of fours! Get the lead out, Ladies—fall in, I say! Men, bring up the rear and keep a sharp eye out for stragglers! Now on the double—trot, ho!"

Right smartly, considering the circumstances and the somewhat confused marching orders, the column of fours makes its way down the slope to the welcoming safety of the army lines.

ORACLE JONES

He is pleased to see that everything appears to be working out for the best. Which is queer, in a way. Because lately the Vision he had some days ago back in Denver that the wagon train would never get through has kept coming back to haunt him.

Well, it just goes to prove that even *he* can be wrong.

Before attempting to clarify a developing situation now rapidly approaching a state of utter chaos, it is necessary to pause briefly and say a word about mules. Contrary to opinions held by uninformed laymen, mules are remarkably intelligent creatures. True, they are sometimes stubborn, but always with reason. A horse will run till he drops dead of exhaustion; when a mule gets tired, he stops and rests. A thirsty or hungry horse will overdrink or overeat; a mule is more temperate. A horse may be spurred by his rider into attempting to cross an unsafe bridge or swim an unswimmable river; a mule's flanks may be slashed to ribbons without budging him.

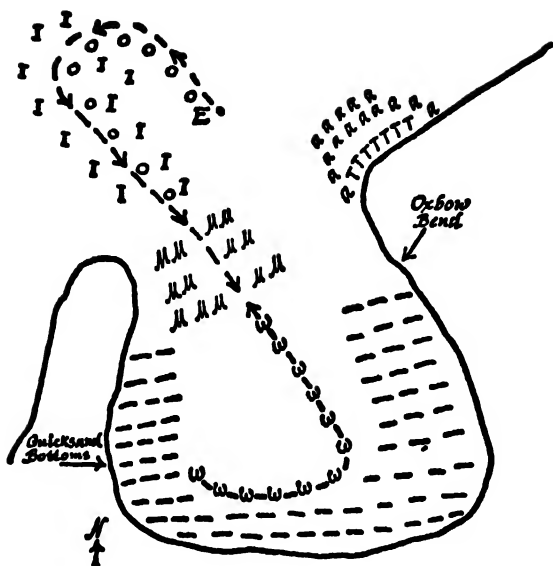
Mules further demonstrate their intelligence by their intense dislike for Indians, by their obdurate refusal to be driven into the face of a windstorm, sandstorm, or snowstorm after its strength passes a certain velocity, and by their creditably sensible instinct to return to the last grazing spot in which they were happy when forced by circumstances into a situation not to their liking.

All the above factors undoubtedly played some part in the unanimous and roughly simultaneous decision of the mules pulling the ransom wagons to return to the camp in Oxbow Bend. That the Indians in nominal control of those wagons (or doing their best to gain nominal control of them) did not wish to return to Oxbow Bend had no practical bearing on the matter. The mules decided to return—so return they did.

The amount of damage done to the fifteen careening wagons and the effervescent cargo contained therein during that wild flight through the blizzard-blanketed day and the widely scattered mob of 200 loot-crazed savages cannot be established; it seems reasonable to assume, however, that considerable damage was done.

In any event, no matter how great it was, it could not have compared with the havoc wrought when those fifteen six-mule teams dragging whatever remained of their wagons and cargoes plunged southbound into the midst of the northbound Denver Citizens' Militia and the sixty-five Wallingham wagons strung out behind in the narrow mouth of the exit to Oxbow Bend.

Graphically illustrated, the ensuing collision looked like this:



Code: "I"—Indians
 "O"—O'Flaherty (formerly) wagons
 "A"—Army
 "T"—Temperance Marchers
 "E"—Exchange Point
 "M"—Citizens' Militia
 "W"—Wallingham Train

Any attempt at a detailed explanation of what followed would be a pretension on the part of the narrator to knowledge that can in no way be proved. Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart and Captain Paul Slater, who would have had an advantageous view-point if their vision had not been completely obscured by the raging blizzard, both affirm that the noise was terrific. The chaos lasted approximately two hours. Later interviews with the few members of the Citizens' Militia willing to talk about the affair have established the fact that the general attitude among them was one of self-preservation. Not a man fired a shot. In the first place, he could see nothing to shoot at; in the second place, the prudent thing to do seemed to be to get out of there as fast as his horse would run.

Certainly a number of Indians were involved in the tangle, but they did no shooting either. Their primary interest was alcohol, of which, following the collision, there was plenty at hand among the wreckage of the wagons.

As to Frank Wallingham's teamsters, a number of them have stated to this investigator that they did absolutely everything a reasonable man had any right to expect teamsters to do to control their mules, sticking gamely to their posts until only a split second was left them to leap to the ground in order to avoid death by collision, hoof kicks, or the even more horrible fate of being swallowed up in the bottomless quicksand pits into which many a wagon was being unwittingly dragged by the panicked mule teams.

Frank Wallingham, of course, has never been known as a reasonable man; since the Oxbow Bend disaster, he has become even less so.

In any event, the tumult lasted about two hours, according to Colonel Gearhart and his aide, who of course prudently maintained their lines somewhat to eastward of the mouth of the Bend, rightly feeling that it was their primary duty to protect the 250 Ladies in their immediate charge. As the bruised, unhappy teamsters found their way into the army camp, they were given hot coffee, their injuries were cared for by the surgeon—sympathetically assisted by the Ladies—and a check-off list was kept by Captain Slater in order that a search might be instigated for the missing men as soon as the weather permitted.

At 2:30 P.M., the snow stopped falling, the air cleared, and Colonel Gearhart, accompanied by Captain Slater and eighteen men, rode into Oxbow Bend to reconnoiter and do whatever needed to be done.

Long ago, Cora Massingale had learned that when a natural disaster such as fire, flood, or tornado struck a community, it was Man's work to clean up the mess and Woman's duty to keep him and the survivors fed and comfortable while that work was being done. With her usual genius for organization, she quickly set up a Field Hospital Corps, a Hot Coffee Corps and a Field Kitchen Corps, and put them into such efficient operation that the creature needs of the dazed teamsters and Citizens' Militia—who first began to straggle into camp in mid-morning and continued to arrive all through the day—were cared for beyond all their expectations.

"This evening we must cook these poor men the most nourishing supper they've ever eaten," she told Louise Gearhart. "Ask the Ladies to contribute whatever delicacies they have. What the men really need, of course, are thick, juicy steaks, but that's out of the question. The Army has lots of bully beef and beans, I'm sure, and we must have some cured hams, potatoes, carrots, onions, and flour left. We'll make up a stew and serve it with hot biscuits. . . ."

"I'll check around," Louise said, "and write out a list. . . ."

Half an hour later she was back, an oddly challenging twinkle in her eyes. Yes, she said, all the stew ingredients Mrs. Massingale had mentioned were available; however, she had run into Oracle Jones, who had made a suggestion. He had just returned from a tour of Oxbow Bend, he said, and had seen a number of dead mules lying around. . . .

"Mule steaks?" Mrs. Massingale exclaimed. "What a horrible thought!"

"Mr. Jones says that when a mule is in its prime, as these

are, it tastes almost as good as buffalo meat or beef. And you said steaks were what the men needed."

"Will he dress them for us?"

"He said he'd be happy to."

"Very well, tell him to go ahead." She laughed humorlessly. "Poor Mr. Wallingham! I wonder what *he* will say if he ever finds out?"

Dusk was falling and the chill air was filled with the appetizing smell of broiling steaks when Frank Wallingham came riding into camp astride a horse led by a dismounted trooper and supported on either side by two mounted soldiers. He looked so dazed and glassy-eyed that Mrs. Massingale gasped.

"Is he badly injured?"

"There ain't a mark on him, ma'am," the dismounted trooper answered. "We found him down in Oxbow Bend sittin' on a barrel of whiskey, just starin' off into space. Must have been there since this mornin'. We can't get him to say a word. He just sits and stares."

"Poor man! Well, you'd better take him to the surgeon. Maybe a pill or a hot poultice will bring him out of it."

"Yes, ma'am. That's what the colonel told us to do."

A short while after the soldiers had gently led Frank Wallingham away, Colonel Gearhart and the rest of the reconnaissance detail rode in. Turning his horse over to one of the enlisted men, the colonel dismounted, strode over to a cooking fire, removed his gauntlets, and warmed his hands, a thoughtful, meditative look on his face.

"What did you find, Thaddeus?" Cora Massingale asked.

"Eh?"

"I asked you what you found."

"It was amazing, Cora—simply amazing!"

"That tells me nothing," she said in exasperation.

"Well, that's what we found—nothing."

"*Absolutely* nothing?"

He shrugged impatiently. "Perhaps *comparatively* nothing would be a more accurate way of putting it. Have you ever seen a battlefield immediately after the fighting was over?"

"No."

"There's always a tremendous amount of debris scattered around—supply wagons, field pieces, equipment, wounded and dead horses, wounded and dead men. Judging from the racket we heard this morning, that was the sort of thing I expected to find in Oxbow Bend."

"But you didn't?"

"Cora, it's the damndest thing I ever experienced. Other than eight or ten broken-down wagons and a few dozen dead mules, Oxbow Bend looks like it's been swept from end to end with a new broom."

"That doesn't sound possible! How could so many wagons disappear into thin air?"

Colonel Gearhart shook his head. "I wish I knew, Cora. Of course, Indians are great scavengers. So are white men, for that matter, when the commodity to be salvaged is alcohol. Captain Slater's theory is that a lot of those wagons blundered into Quicksand Bottoms and sank out of sight. The ones that were left, he guesses, were taken over by the Indians and the Citizens' Militia."

"You told me that mules couldn't be made to face a blizzard. How in the world would the wagons be pulled?"

"The Indians and the Militia have horses, Cora. It would be a simple enough matter to cut the mules loose, tie a dozen ropes to a wagon tongue, and tow it away with ridden horses. Necessity, as they say, is the mother of invention."

"Well, I never!" Mrs. Massingale exclaimed indignantly. "Is there *nothing* a man won't do for alcohol?"

Colonel Gearhart looked at her levelly, then shook his head. "Practically nothing, no." He sniffed the air hungrily. "Say, those steaks smell good! Where in the devil did you forage them?"

"The less you know about that, the better appetite you'll have," Cora Massingale answered with a smile. "But they do smell good, don't they? In fact, I think I'll try a small piece of one myself."

The hour was late; all the campfires but one had died to embers; and except for the troopers standing guard and the four

people drinking a final cup of coffee in front of the lone still-lively fire the camp slept.

"... and that, sir," Captain Slater said, closing his journal, "completes the list of the casualties and the missing."

"Did you check your roster of the teamsters with Frank Wallingham to make sure all were present or accounted for?"

"He's asleep, sir. But Rafe Pike said it was complete."

"Oh, I'm so glad none of the teamsters were killed or seriously hurt," Mrs. Massingale said. "And I'm pleased that the surgeon managed to relax Mr. Wallingham so that he could sleep. Did he give him a dose of laudanum?"

"No, ma'am. He got him to drink a cupful of whiskey. It knocked him right out."

Colonel Gearhart frowned. "Where did that sawbones get any whiskey? Yesterday he tried to borrow some from—" He glanced at Cora Massingale and broke off. "Never mind."

"Sir, you might as well know. Since the affair this morning, a number of officers, non-coms, and enlisted men seem to have acquired a certain amount of whiskey and champagne. So far, it's created no problem, but if you feel, sir, that an investigation is called for, I'll arrange a shakedown of the entire camp tomorrow morning."

"Don't bother," the colonel growled. "All soldiers are pack rats and entitled to salvage rights." He sighed. "Fifteen wagon loads of imported French champagne! I wonder who's guzzling it now? Well, we can toast the new bride with blackberry cordial. Will that satisfy you, Louise?"

"Of course it will, Father."

"One thing puzzles me, Paul," Colonel Gearhart said. "According to your figures, of the 100 members of the Denver Citizens' Militia you've accounted for only twenty-five. What happened to the rest of them?"

"My guess is, sir, that they headed for Denver without troubling to say good-by."

"Does Clayton Howell agree with you?"

"Mr. Howell is one of the missing. But Oracle Jones doesn't seem in the least worried about them."

"Only one thing in life ever worries that man," Mrs. Massin-

gale said grimly. "His supply of alcohol. He's the worst old soak I've ever known—and I've known a few, believe me."

"Do you really think he drinks a lot?" Colonel Gearhart said. "I've never seen him drunk."

"No, but I'll bet you've never seen him completely sober either." She laughed. "Oh, don't think I'm starting a crusade to reform *him*. He's beyond redemption. He's . . . oh my goodness, isn't that him coming now?"

Smiling genially, the old mountain man strolled out of the shadows, squatted down on the far side of the fire without waiting to be asked to join the group, gazed dreamily into the flames for a time, then said, "Shore was fun while it lasted, wa'n't it?"

All agreed that it sure was.

"Gonna be a few drunk Injuns scattered acrost the countryside fer a spell," he muttered, appearing to talk more to himself than to them. "'Course, they ain't likely to do harm to nobody but theirselves. Injuns don't circulate around much in the snow. They're kind of like prairie dogs—jest hole up somewheres come the first snowfall and stay there till spring. It's gonna be a long, snowy winter, I'm thinkin'. Come spring, their whiskey'll all be gone."

"That's the first cheerful thing I've heard all day," Colonel Gearhart said.

"You can count on it. Old Oracle Jones ain't never wrong." He brooded silently into the fire for a while. "Wal, come mornin' I s'pose you folks'll be headin' back to Cheyenne?"

"Weather permitting, yes." Colonel Gearhart looked apologetically at Cora Massingale. "Am I assuming too much when I take it for granted you are abandoning your plan to reform the citizens of Denver—for the time being?"

"Not just for the time being, Thaddeus—forever. After what I've gone through for them and the small thanks they've given me, the citizens of Denver may look after themselves from now on."

"You know, ma'am," Oracle Jones said, nodding agreeably, "them's my sentiments exactly. Them Denver people jest ain't worth savin'. I've had my fill of 'em."

"Where do you plan to go, Mr. Jones?"

"I been thinkin' on that, ma'am. Fact, I had a kind of Vision. It told me to stay right here in Oxbow Bend."

"What on earth will you do?"

"Wal, ma'am, when a body gits as old as I am he don't feel like doin' much of anything. This is a purty spot. Thar's game on the plains, fish in the river, an' all the water, wood, an' grass handy a body could ask for. What more does an old coot like me need?"

From the look Cora gave him, Thaddeus Gearhart knew she was tempted to answer that rhetorical question, but she pursed her lips and kept silent as the old mountain man continued his musings.

". . . an' it's a mighty interestin' spot, too, Oxbow Bend is, whar somethin' fantastical an' entertainin' happens every week or two. You'd jest ought t' hear some of the wild tales the Injuns tell about the place. Like f'r instance the Cheyenne buck an' his pony which sunk out of sight in a pit in Quicksand Bottoms one day, an' then, exactly a year later, was seen to ooze back up out of the pit lookin' as natural an' lifelike as you please. They was dead, of course. . . ."

"I should certainly think so!"

". . . an' the Injuns that seen 'em got so scared they run off and didn't come back fer a week an' when they did come back the buck an' his pony was gone. You see, what happens to things that sink into them pits down in Quicksand Bottoms is they kind of git petrified, only with real light minerals which, under certain conditions of underground water pressure or somethin', makes 'em come back up to the surface an' float around fer a spell. . . ."

There now remain only a few relevant facts to report. Some of these admittedly have no direct bearing on the subject of this document; however, as they do detail events which had their genesis in or near Oxbow Bend they seem worthy of brief mention:

Fact 1.

As yet, no lawsuits over the loss of the eighty wagons, their contents, and the mules have been filed. The Wallingham

Freighting Company is bankrupt and out of business. Having no tangible assets, Frank Wallingham cannot be profitably sued by the Denver Saloon Owners' Association for non-fulfillment of his contract nor by the Philadelphia Brewing and Importing Company for non-payment of the ninety-day note which he gave them when he contracted for the whiskey and champagne.

He has written a number of strongly worded letters to the War Department, the Indian Bureau, the National and Territorial Representatives, and the Temperance Movement leaders, threatening suit, but to date has started no formal litigation of any kind. Several complicating factors are involved here. First, he has no money with which to employ competent counsel; second, he appears to be aware of the fact that if he did sue and won, he would immediately be sued himself by the Philadelphia Brewing Company and the Denver Saloon Owners' Association; third, he has become so addicted to drink all temperate men shun him.

Fact 2.

Although a great deal of moisture fell in Denver during the next few months in the form of snow, the season is now referred to by the natives as the "Dry Winter."

Fact 3.

At the reception following the marriage of Louise Gearhart to Captain Paul Slater, the bride was not toasted with black-berry cordial but with imported French champagne. How Cora Massingale arranged that little surprise, she laughingly refused to reveal to the bride's father; but he suspected she had done some conniving with Oracle Jones. To his astonishment, she politely sipped a response to each and every toast.

Fact 4.

At the reception following the marriage of Cora Templeton Massingale to Colonel Thaddeus Gearhart, imported French champagne also was served. The two marriages, it should be noted, were spaced a week apart. Post gossip has it that before retiring for the nuptial night, the happy couple consumed an entire bottle of this same beverage as they sat holding hands

and gazing into the fire crackling cheerfully in the fireplace. Since that time, Mrs. Gearhart has retired from active participation in the Temperance Movement.

Fact 5.

A homestead claim has been filed by Oracle Jones on a piece of land locally known as Oxbow Bend; a small cabin has been built there and the marshy area called Quicksand Bottoms has been fenced off to prevent unwary travelers or their animals from coming to a tragic end. When last visited by the author of this document, Mr. Jones appeared to be happy and healthy—and his hospitality was above reproach.

And that, Mr. President, is what happened to the Wallingham Train.

Respectfully submitted,

James Oliver Perry

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Somewhere in the dark mansion a clock struck two. Jim Perry heard the sound but vaguely. Vaguely he realized that he had stopped reading, that his tongue was thick and sour-tasting, that his throat was dry and raw. Pushed to one side of the desk were dirty dishes and the leftovers of a meal he faintly recalled having laced with brandy. After a time the supply of coffee had been a number of briefer pauses for throat-moistening sips of coffee laced with brandy. After a time the supply of coffee had been exhausted and rather than trouble the sleeping servants he and his listener had made do with straight brandy.

Although his eyes were not focusing too well, he could make out a pair of crossed, shoeless feet resting on the desk top, and he noted that one of the socks had a hole in its heel. Beyond the feet, there was a face, a short-trimmed beard, a half-smoked dead cigar, and a pair of eyes which seemed to be vacantly studying some object of interest in the shadows of a far corner of the room. Save for the quiet patter of rain against the curtained window, no sound could be heard.

He began to grow uneasy. These were always the longest, most soul-wracking moments in a writer's life, these moments of silence after he had finished reading a creation into which he had poured his life's blood. One hardly expected a fanfare of trumpets, a roll of drums, and a tumultuous roar from 10,000 throats as the audience leaped to its feet wildly cheering. A nod, a smile, a word of approval—any one of these would be enough. But to be given nothing but a vacant stare and dead silence. . . .

President Grant cleared his throat. "More brandy?"

"Thank you, sir, but I've had enough."

"That's quite a report, Jim."

Quite good? Quite bad? Oh please, Mr. President, this is no

time to beat around the bush! I'm a professional newspaperman and my business is truth. Tell *me* the truth I can take it. Of course, if you say it's bad I'll go out and shoot myself, but even that would be better than leaving me hanging in a creative purgatory midway between Heaven and Hell.

The President applied a match to the end of his cold cigar. "Did I tell you I'd been approached by a publisher who wants me to write a personal history of the war?"

"No, sir, but I'm sure a great number of readers would be interested in such a book. It should sell very well."

"Yes. I toyed with the idea. Even got an opening chapter down on paper. After I'd read it over, I tossed it in the fire. Dullest thing imaginable. You see, Jim, I lack your talent for making history come alive."

"Then you felt, sir," Jim Perry said eagerly, "that in my report there was some small spark?"

Now the President smiled. "You kept me here listening. What greater compliment can I give you than that? You're a genius, Jim, in a way. When and if I get around to writing my memoirs, I hope you'll give me a hand. You know what I mean—sort of smooth out the rough spots and liven up the dead places. You have a knack for that."

"Mr. President, I would consider it a great honor to give you whatever assistance I can."

"Now then, about the payment for your report——"

"Sir, the words of praise you have given me and the hours I have spent with you tonight are payment enough."

"You're a little drunk, Jim, or you'd realize you can't cash praise and time spent with me at the bank. You contracted to do a job for a price; you did it well; you deserve to be paid for it. I'll have a draft drawn in your favor to the amount of \$10,000 the first thing Monday morning. Leave the report. I'll see that it's placed in a safe repository."

"There was an alternative, sir——"

Getting to his feet and stretching broadly, President Grant shook his head, walked around the desk, and said as he ushered his guest to the door. "No, Jim, I don't think this yarn of yours should be turned loose on the public at this time—whether in

the columns of the *New York Tribune* or the pages of the *Congressional Record*."

"I defer to your judgment, of course, Mr. President. But I must confess I'm curious. What will you do with it?"

"Just quietly file it away, my boy, in some dark and dusty basement storage room where it won't be found for a few years—if ever." President Grant opened the office door. "Don't look so glum, Jim! A writer has to make a choice, you know—either he writes for cash or he writes for posterity. You've taken the cash. Let posterity go hang."

"I know you're right, sir," Jim Perry said wearily, nodding his head. "Still, one can't help but dream. . . ."

"That posterity will discover you some day? Well, such a thing could happen." The President gave his visitor an affectionate pat on the shoulder as he sent him on his way. "Hang on to your dream, Jim. The world isn't ready for your kind of writing yet. But maybe someday—a hundred years or so from now, say—an historian will go poking through those dusty basement files. . . ."